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It's barbecue time.

Bentley, the yeti with a mean left hook.

Spyro gets totally vert.

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SPYRO
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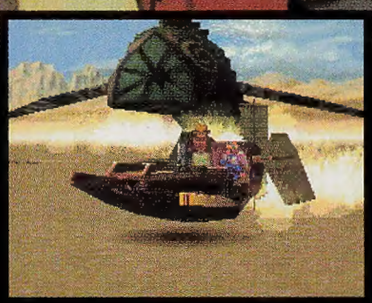

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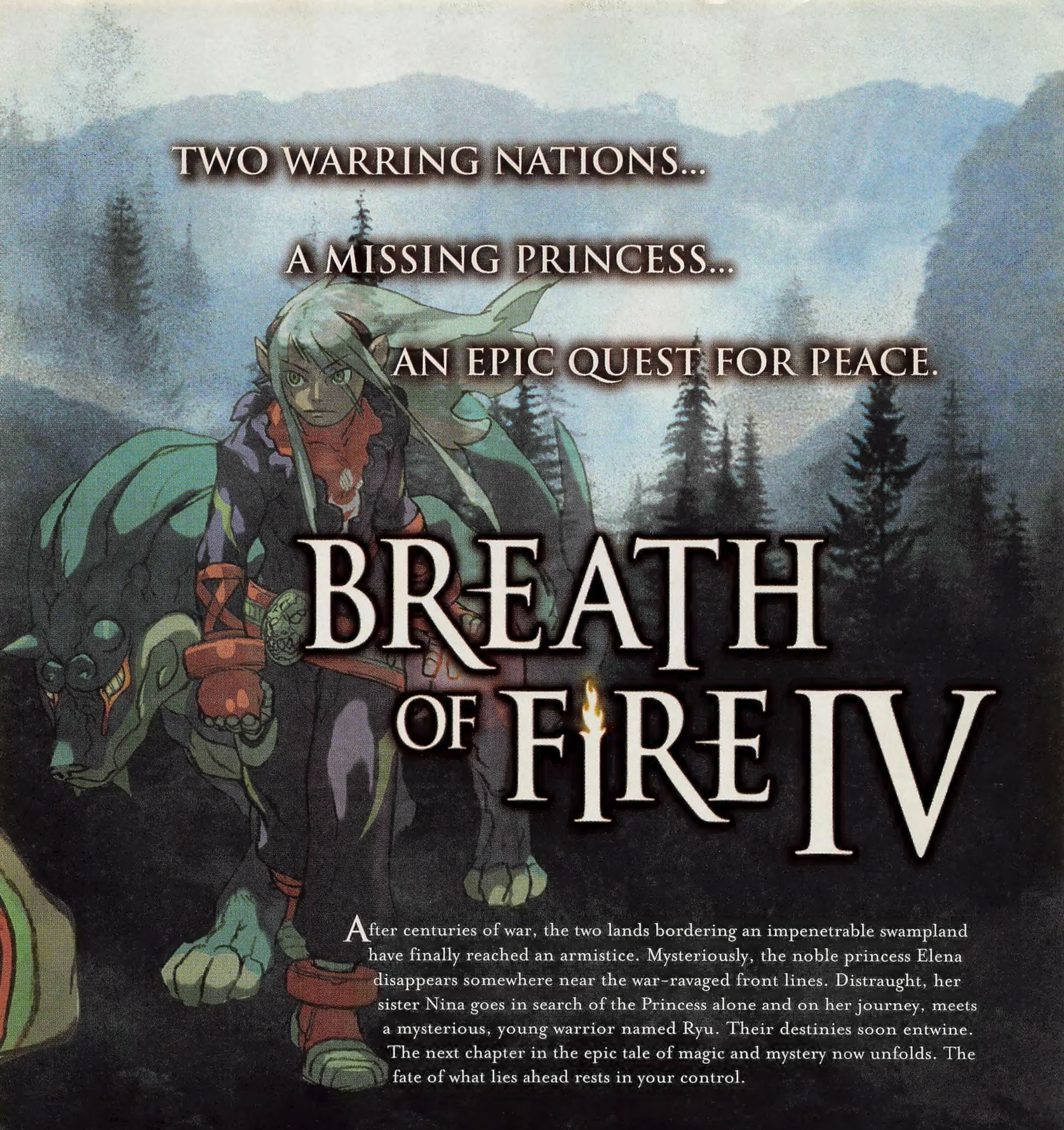

After centuries of war, the two lands bordering an impenetrable swampland have finally reached an armistice. Mysteriously, the noble princess Elena disappears somewhere near the war-ravaged front lines. Distraught, her sister Nina goes in search of the Princess alone and on her journey, meets a mysterious, young warrior named Ryu. Their destinies soon entwine. The next chapter in the epic tale of magic and mystery now unfolds. The fate of what lies ahead rests in your control.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Animated Violence

PlayStation

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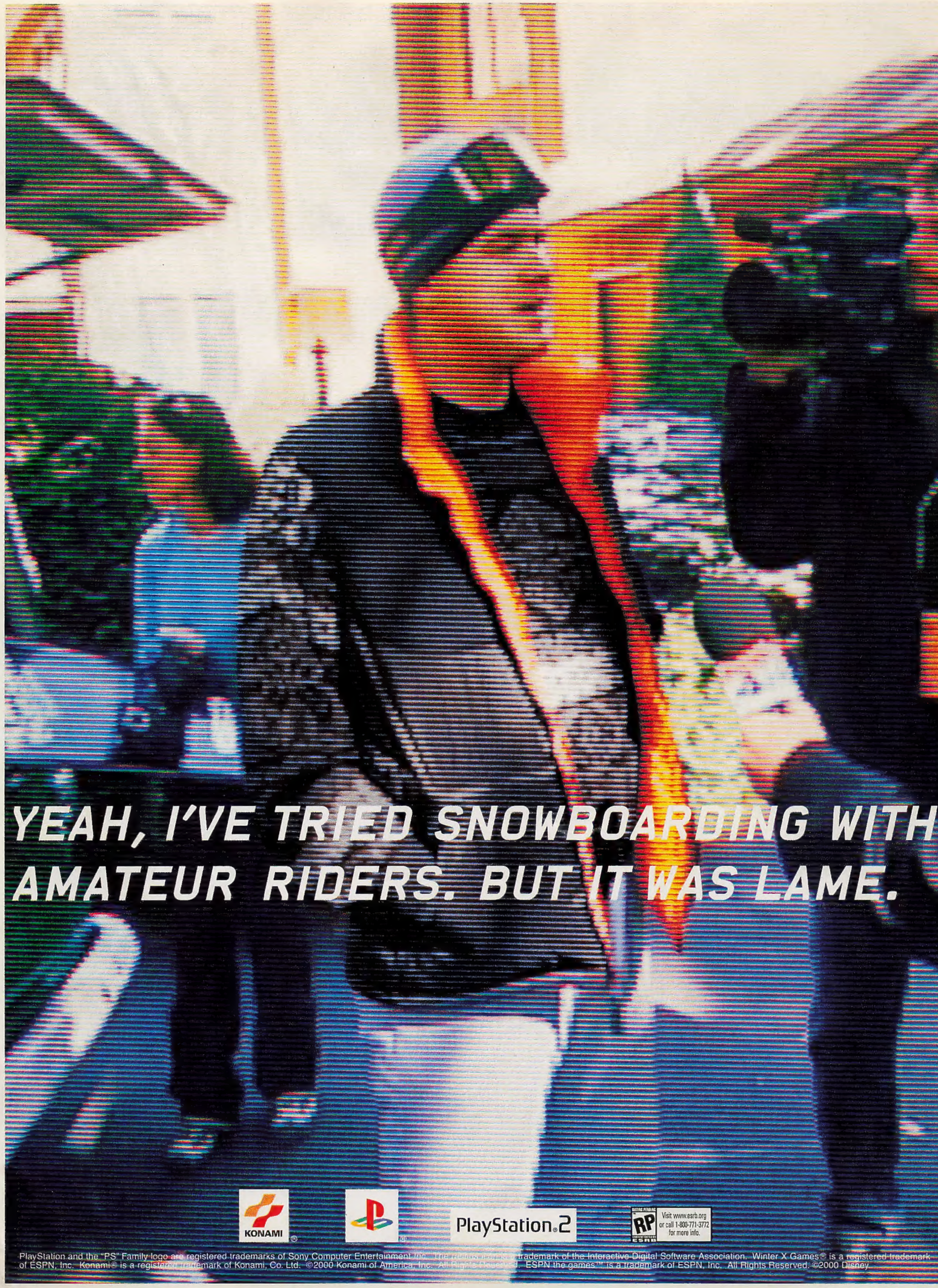

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INTRODUCING

WINTER X GAMES SNOWBOARDING

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Ed Zone

This month ECM is going to play nice. After all, tis the season to be jolly (or it will be by the time you're reading this), and since I've had a skewer-fest the past two months in Ed Zone (at the very least), I thought I'd take a more optimistic, less out-and-out negative tack to prove, among other things, that I'm actually capable of seeing the 'bright side of things'—I know, I'm not sure I can either.

Since this is technically the last issue in our calendar year (despite that you'll be reading it in early November), indulge me and allow me to run through a few things that made me exceedingly happy this annum... if you get bored, there's still a massive magazine ahead of you, so you can always come back when you're done with everything else... not that that's an issue, right?

First off, for those of you that have taken advantage of our twelve-issues-for-$12 deal the last few months, good move! Not only does it ensure that you'll get your mag anywhere from 2-3 weeks ahead of the rest of the world, it also shows that you clearly have discriminating taste when it comes to gaming literature (that's right, *literature*)—instead of fighting over the last, hacked up copy at your local gaming emporium, book store, or (god forbid) 7-11 (ever seen what happens to magazines that go there... the ones that aren't snapped up in the first week or so... tis a ghastly sight, my friends). For those of you that haven't, well, do you enjoy wasting extra money?

Next, I'm glad to see the stunningly positive reception the new and expanded Graveyard and Shooter's Alley have received over the past few months. It proves one thing that my publisher and I have battled over all year: Hardcore (i.e. real) gamers are still alive and well, despite what others may have you believe. And for those of you that think playing *Final Fantasy* or *Metal Gear* makes you 'hardcore,' well, wake up! Oh, and believe it or not, Atari Jaguar coverage has actually received a reception way above and beyond what any of us thought it would... count on more in the future **plus** a more in-depth look at other 'homeless' consoles including some heavy duty PC Engine (it's coming!) coverage coming soon.

A special thanks to our competitors, who despite all their flaws, mistruths, and downright empty-headedness make it that much easier for us to look good month-in, month-out. It's almost like we don't have to work some issues—thanks!

I'd also like to thank the fine fellows at www.videogamedepot.com for providing so many of the fine imports you see in each issue of GameFan (as well as being masters of tracking down those rare games that we all gotta have—speaking of which, where's my *Typing of the Dead* with keyboard, guys?). Without these masters of the obscure (particularly VGD) you wouldn't see half the games in GF you currently do. Do us a favor and patronize these guys this holiday season—they're gamers like you and me and not a faceless corporation out to fleece you of all your hard-earned dough.

Last, but not least, let me just wish all of our readers a very happy, very merry holiday season, no matter your beliefs, family situation (hey Fury!), or location (special Merry Christmas goes to all our readers in the 'service' who won't be able to make it home for the holidays).

With that, I'm outta here. Be sure to drop me a line at emylonas@gamefan.com and tell me what you think of our new look and how we're doing—as always, I read 'em all!

Till next month, I'm...

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Eric Mylonas

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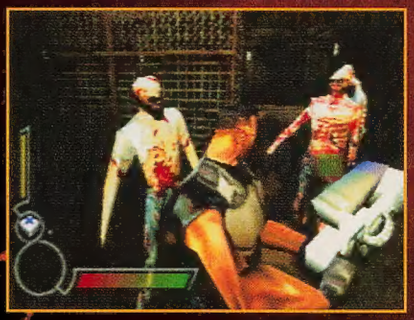

Ammo, baby!
Eliminate evil using guns, knives, grenades, fists, feet... and of course, swords.

Gothic 3-D locations
Backdrops for battle include Chinatown, sewers and the Gothic City Museum.

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Animated Blood and Gore
Animated Violence

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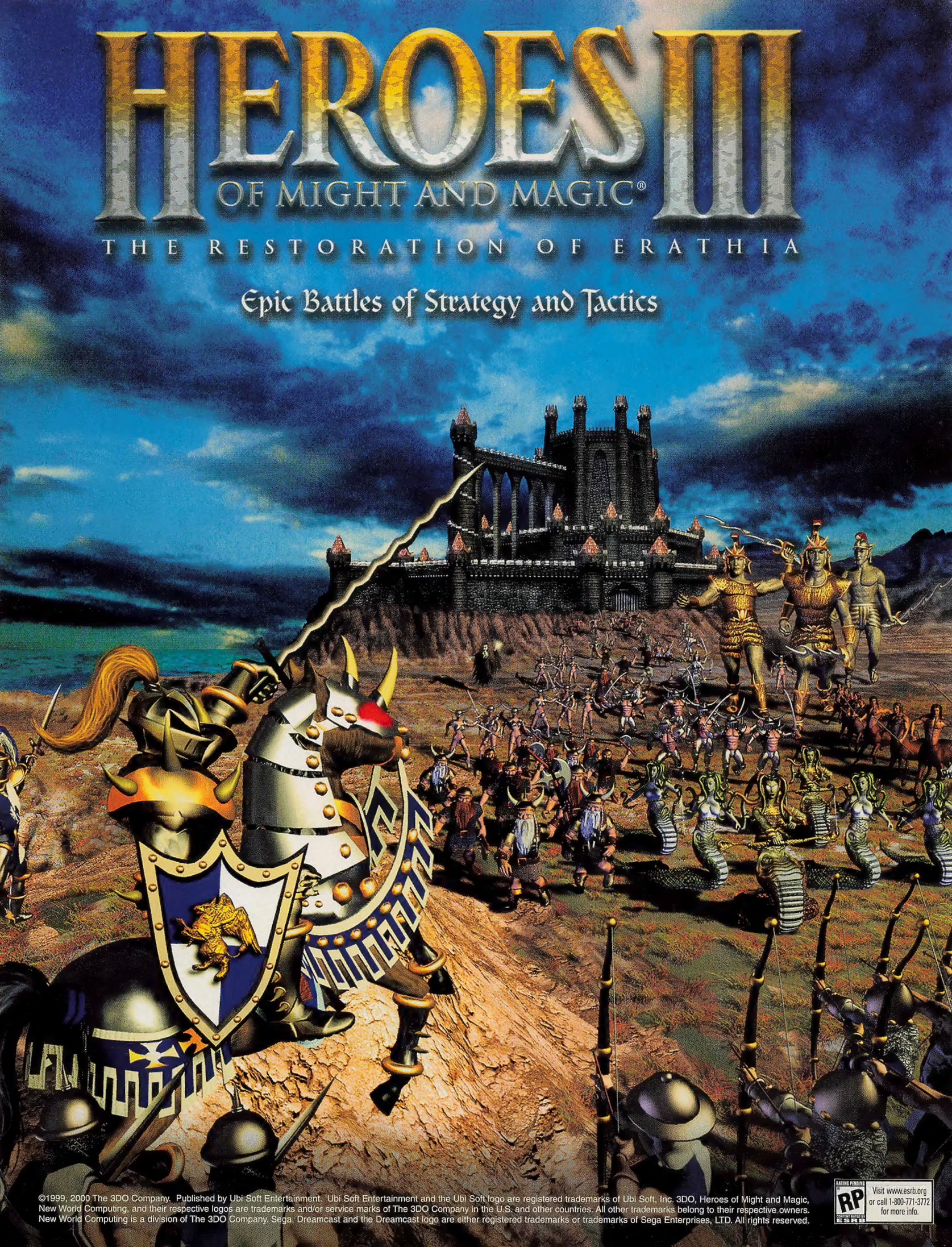

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Table of Contents

Vol.8 Iss.12 December 2000

Cover Story

Cover Art by Partick Spaziante

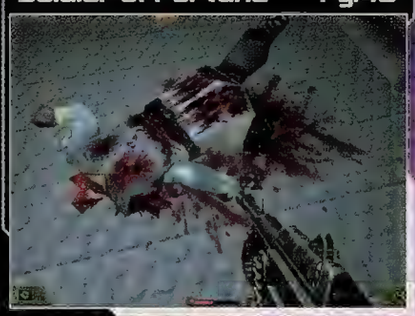
Final Fantasy IX 34

Ed Zone 6
Top Ten/Most Wanted 14
Editor's Round-Up 18
Viewpoints 22
Dreamcast 66
PlayStation/PS2 90
Nintendo 64 118
Gamefan Sports 126
Europa 128
Japan Now 131
Imports 136
Graveyard 142
AnimeFan 150
Hocus Pocus 158
OtherStuff 162
FanFan 164
Postmeister 166
Advertiser's Index 161

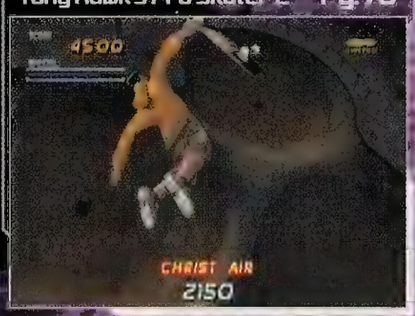
Red Dog Pg.70

Shen Mue Pg.66

Soldier of Fortune Pg.46



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 Pg.78



Zeldo Majora's Mask Pg.118

Game Index

007 Racing (PS) 113
18 Wheeler American Pro (DC) 132
Aidyn Chronicles (N64) 124
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes (PS2) 104
Batman Beyond (N64) 122
The Bouncer (PS2) 131
Breath of Fire IV (PS) 96
Chicken Run (DC) 86
Chicken Run (PS) 105
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX (DC) 86
Desperia (DC) 132
Dinosaur (DC) 84
Donald Duck (DC) 86
Driver 2 (PS) 108
Emperor's New Groove (PS) 110
Eternal Darkness (N64) 124
Final Fantasy IX (PS) 34
Final Fantasy (WS) 133
Freefall (Nuon) 52
G-Saviour (PS2 import) 138
Gran Turismo 3: A Spec (PS2) 114, 133
Hot Wheels Hybrid Extreme Racing (PS) 106
Illbleed (DC) 132
Jet Grind Radio (DC) 75
Klonoa 2 (PS2) 131
Looney Tunes Space Race (DC) 74
Max Steel (DC) 82
Ms. Pacman (N64) 122
NHL 2001 (PS2) 127
Orphen (PS2) 90
Prikura Daisakusen (Saturn import) 143
Prince of Persia (DC) 82
Rayman 2: Revolution (PS2) 102
Red Dog (DC) 70
Rogue Spear (DC) 84
Rollcage Stage 2 (PS) 98
Sega Marine Fishing (DC) 124
Shenmue (DC) 66
Silent Scope (PS2) 92
Silpheed (PS2 import) 136
Skies of Arcadia (DC) 80
Sky Odyssey (PS2) 114
Soldier of Fortune (PS2) 46
Sonic Adventure 2 (DC) 86
Star wars Starfighter (PS2) 103
Stunt GP (DC) 79
Tobal 2 (PS) 144
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (DC) 78
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (PS) 158-161
Torneko (PS) 106
Twisted Metal Black (PS2) 114
UFC (PS) 105
Unreal Tournament (PS2) 100
Warriors of Might and Magic (PS2) 99
WCW Backstage Assault (N64) 124
Wild Wild Racing (PS2) 94
World Dest. League Thunder Tanks (PS2) 104
WWF Smackdown 2 (PS) 112
Xtreme Sports (DC) 81
Zelda Majora's Mask (N64) 118

A classic battle of eat or be eaten.

Torneko is hungry. But so are the monsters. Wtih character and monster design by Akira Toriyama, ***Torneko: The Last Hope*** is an addictive RPG-style adventure with a twist! You'll sweat bullets trying to survive the ***Dragon Warrior*** monsters coming at you in an ever-changing labyrinth of dungeons. But if you get Torneko his food, you just might make it out alive!

WORLD OF DRAGON WARRIOR

TORNEKO

THE LAST HOPE ™

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PlayStation

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Mild Animated Violence
Comic Mischief

ENIX

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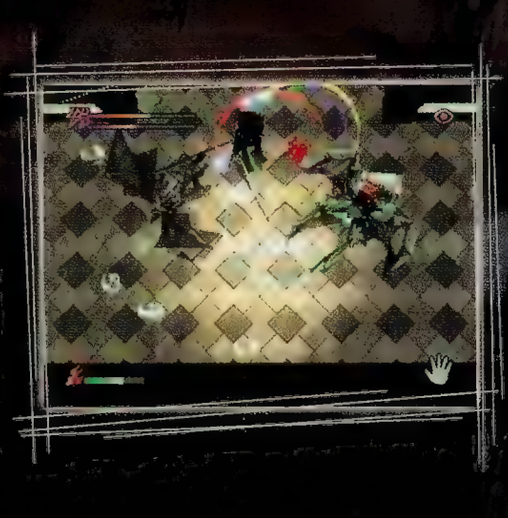
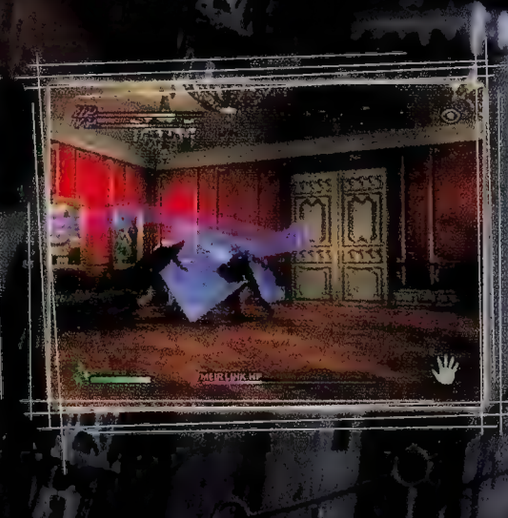
10,000 years have passed since the final war brought the history of the human race to its end. Since that time, vampires have reigned over the world. But now they are dying as a species–this is their final hour. The humans are regaining their power after many long dark years. However, some vampires remain in the remote region and continue their horrific attacks against humans. Such action has brought about the hiring of bounty hunters to destroy them. Among these hunters, the Dunpeals, half vampire and half human, are considered the finest. In time, people began to talk about a hunter with remarkable skills...

That hunter is D... Vampire Hunter D...

The adventure begins...





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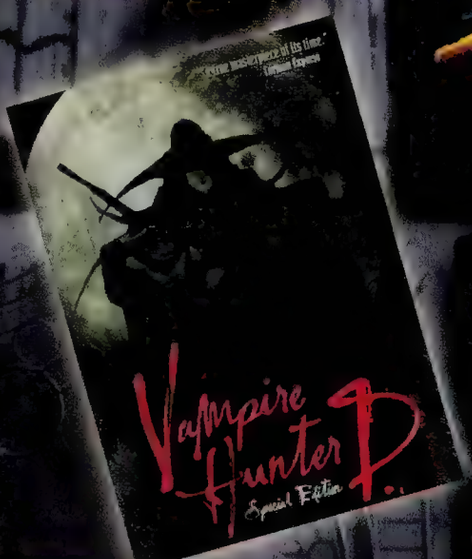
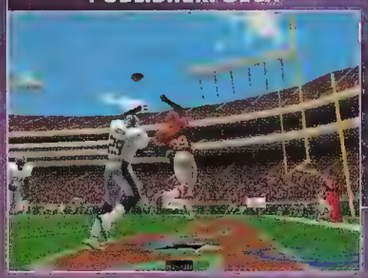


DVD Coming in October

Top Ten Most Wanted

NFL 2K1
Publisher: Sega



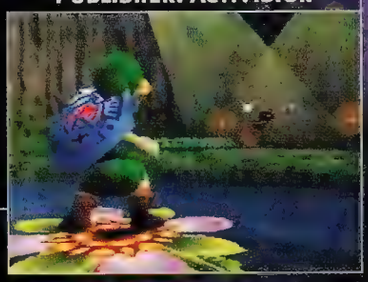
Reader's Top Ten

1) *NFL 2K1* - DC
2) *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* - PS
3) *Parasite Eve 2* - PS
4) *UFC* - DC
5) *Pokemon Puzzle League* - N64
6) *Madden 2001* - PS
7) *Spiderman* - PS
8) *Valkyrie Profile* - PS
9) *Chrono Cross* - PS
10) *Tenchu 2* - PS

Reader's Most Wanted

1) *Zelda Majora's Mask* - N64
2) *Final Fantasy IX* - PS
3) *Madden 2001* - PS2
4) *Tekken Tag Tournament* - PS2
5) *WWF Smackdown 2* - PS2
6) *Metal Gear Solid 2* - PS2
7) *Grandia 2* - DC
8) *The World Is Not Enough* - N64
9) *Quake 3 Arena* - DC
10) *Shenmue* - DC

Zelda Majora's Mask
Publisher: Activision

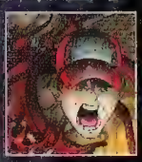


GameFan Editors' Most Wanted

- *Sonic Adventure 2* - DC
- *Phantasy Star Online* - DC
- *Metal Gear Solid 2* - PS2
- *Banjo Tooie* - N64
- *Star Ocean 3* - DC
- *Monster Rancher 3* - PS2
- *Virtua Fighter X* - DC
- *Klonoa 2* - PS2
- *Daytona* - DC
- *Twisted Metal Black* - PS2

(in no particular order)

GameFan Editors' Top Ten



1) *Zelda Majora's Mask* - N64
2) *Xtreme Sports* - DC
3) *Red Dog* - DC
4) *Dragon Blaze* - Arcade
5) *NFL 2K1* - DC
6) *Armored Core 2* - PS2
7) *Raiden Fighters Jet* - Arcade
8) *Contra: Hard Corps* - Genesis
9) *Prikura Daisakusen** - Saturn
10) *Tobal 2** - PS

1) *Everquest* - PC
2) *Baldur's Gate 2* - PC
3) *NFL 2K1* - DC
4) *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX* - PS
5) *Marine Fishing* - DC
6) *Warlords Battlecry* - PC
7) *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* - PS
8) *NHL 2001* - PS2
9) *Chicken Run* - PS
10) *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX* - DC

1) *NFL 2K1* - DC
2) *Final Fantasy IX* - PS
3) *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* - PS
4) *Diablo II* - PC
5) *Dragon Blaze* - Arcade
6) *Strikers 1945** - Saturn
7) *Strikers 1945 II** - Saturn
8) *Final Fantasy* - NES
9) *Final Fantasy II* - SNES
10) *Boulder Dash* - C64

1) *Zelda Majora's Mask* - N64
2) *Jet Grind Radio* - DC
3) *Radiant Silvergun** - Saturn
4) *Dead or Alive 2 LE** - DC
5) *Xtreme Sports* - DC
6) *Skies of Arcadia* - DC
7) *Dynasty Warriors 2* - PS2
8) *Red Dog* - DC
9) *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX* - DC
10) *D2* - DC

1) *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* - PS
2) *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* - DC
3) *Tekken Tag Tournament* - PS2
4) *Hogs of War* - PS
5) *Final Fantasy IX* - PS
6) *Ridge Racer V* - PS2
7) *Smuggler's Run* - PS2
8) *Zelda Majora's Mask* - N64
9) *Worms Armageddon* - PC
10) *Quake II* - PC

* Import Title

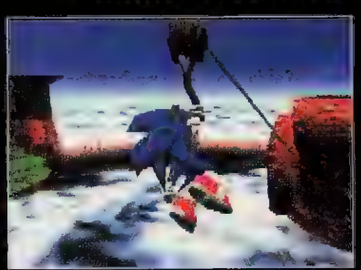
Developer's Top Ten

Joseph Sutton: Vice President Research & Development for Majesco, Inc.

Top 10 Favorite Games of All-Time:

1) All Sonic Games
2) Unreal Tournament
3) Ape Escape
4) Mario 64
5) Tribes
6) The Madden Series
7) NHL 97 - 00
8) NBA 2K
9) Mario Tennis
10) Quake 3

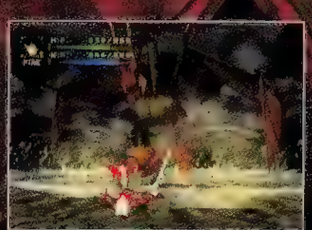
***Sonic*: Developed & Published by Sega**

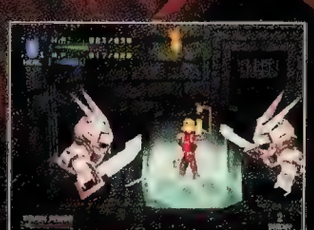


I'm a big fan of first-person shooters. I love the challenge of going online to test my skills and strategies against fellow gamers all over the world. In particular, to hop into a death-match and go head-to-head with the development teams here at our Pipedream Interactive studio. Whether playing or creating, we're a group that is absolutely passionate about gaming!

YOU DEFEND YOUR FAMILY.
YOU DEFEND YOUR HOMELAND.
YOU DEFEND ALL THAT IS GOOD.

BUT FIRST, YOU MUST DEFEND YOURSELF.





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TEEN T Animated Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation

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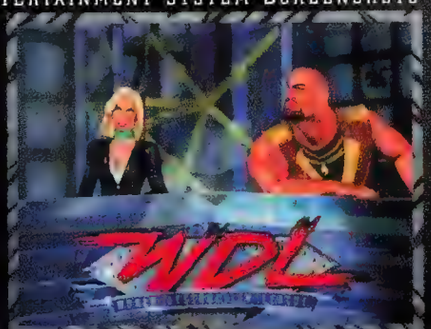
ACTUAL PLAYSTATION®2 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM SCREENSHOTS



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PRODUCTS RANGE FROM ... TO T

RP-T

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence

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Give new meaning to the term "contact sport." It's head-to-head arena-style action - with tanks. You'll be cheered on by thousands of spectators while you compete globally against representatives from other countries - by blowing them up. With televised coverage of these battles, you can even wave "hello" to Mom - if you survive. WDL™ Thunder Tanks™ Where world destruction goes prime time.

Editor Round-Up

Keeping with the *Final Fantasy* theme this month (even our cosplayer of the month dresses up as Edea), we posed the question to our editors which is burning in everyone's mind (or at least in Eggo's)... **"If you could be any *Final Fantasy* character, who would you be?"**

ECM

ECM has a soft spot for big, sweaty muscleheads who solve problems with brute strength as opposed to thinking things through. He also fancies himself to be a real-life Sabin (from *FFIII*). Just take a close look at his character for an idealized representation of how he'd would like to portray himself—one big meathead. The only problem is ECM isn't royalty... and we always pictured Sabin being a bit taller.

emylonas@gamefan.com

REUBUS

Reubus doesn't really play *Final Fantasy*, so we had to choose for him. He's actually very similar to Edward, the bard from *Final Fantasy II*, because he's always telling stories of the past or casually strumming his guitar for recreation. He's also a bit on the frail side, so if he were a party member, we'd probably stick him in the back row with the women and children.

bstockert@gamefan.com

THE JUDGE

The Judge is like Kain, the Dragoon from *Final Fantasy IV*. He's never around half the time because he's always Jump-ing around on planes, flying to different PR trips. He's also extremely fast... when it comes to cranking out the work. Go get a cup of coffee, and when you return he'll be playing *Warlords III* because he already finished his quota for the day.

ghiggins@gamefan.com

EGGO

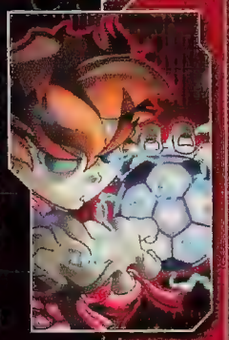
There's no question Eggo modeled his character after Shadow from *FFIII*. Solitary, independent ninja who keeps to himself. We're not sure if Eggo would slit his mama's throat for a nickel (maybe a quarter), and he also apparently has an aversion to dogs. So much for the faithful Interceptor, eh? Although didn't Shadow have some buried secret relationship with the young girl Relm? Hmmm...

gngo@gamefan.com

FURY

Fury is obsessed with Vivi the black mage (who is on our cover). He claims it dates back to childhood and a fascination with Orko from He-man. Fury says, "I always wanted to know what was under his hood. What is he hiding under there?" We're inclined to attribute this curiosity about 'what's under the black mage's clothes' to his working late the past couple nights... at least that's what we hope.

jweitzner@gamefan.com



KODOMO

Since Kodomo is playing hooky today, we can't tell you who he'd pick. However, if we had to make the choice for him, he's sort of like Setzer—a wild, drinking, reclusive gambler who throws away his money (yes, he loves those PR-sponsored Vega$ trips). The only aspect that doesn't fit is the womanizing. We haven't seen Kodomo go on a date in a while... maybe he'll have to resort to kidnapping like Setzer did.

mvstone@gamefan.com

THE 6th MAN

We're answering this question for him. The 6th Man is most like Yuffie from *Final Fantasy VII*. In one word—annoying! If he's not playing some horribly bad game which he dug out of the game library or telling us how much money he made on the stock market that day, he's on the phone all day chatting with friends while the rest of us are trying to work. He's also has that innocent, naive quality.

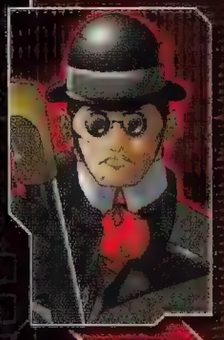
the6thman@gamefan.com

The Art Department

TAO

Not only is Cid Tao's favorite character, but he actually takes after him in real life. Whenever something breaks down or we need some mechanical/technical expertise, we turn to Tao as our Mr. Fix-it. The question is, does he take after the Cid from *FFIII* who's the kindly grandfather-type? The Cid in *FFVII*—an abusive, misogynistic husband? Or the Cid in *FFIX*, a king who gets turned into a frog by his angry wife?

ktran@gamefan.com



SKETCH

We haven't quite figured Sketch out yet. He claims he wants to be Cait Sith from *Final Fantasy VII*. To this day, nobody has figured out exactly what Cait Sith was. Is it a cross between Mog and Umaro? Why on earth would Sketch call attention to the fact that his character floats a few inches off the ground? These are the questions that beg for answers as we try to solve the enigma of the man called Sketch...

gmaghari@gamefan.com

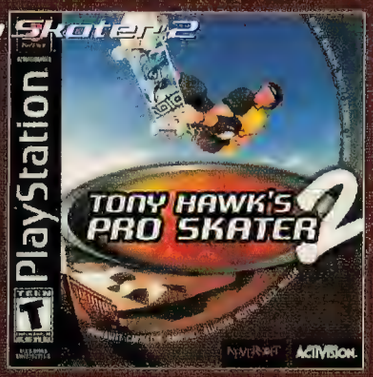
PHOENIX

Surprisingly, Phoenix didn't want to take after his namesake, the famous caller spell from *Final Fantasy*. Instead, he wishes he were a Chocobo. We can kind of see it: big, likable, cuddly... But then the comparisons end. Chocobo is on his way to being a mascot for the company, while Phoenix is low-man on the pecking order. Chocobo enjoys eating Gysahl Greens while Phoenix gets by on chicken feed.

bnorton@gamefan.com

Productivity
Killer of the Month

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2



Height: a few inches around
Weight: about an ounce
Blood Type: Spattered
Special Ability: The amazing ability to keep GameFan's eager editors from completing their daily assignments.

Is there any surprise here? Even before this game came out, we were spending many a late night to early morning at the office playing both the PlayStation and Dreamcast versions. You don't need us to tell you how good this game is. You should already know... in fact, your thumb should be calloused by now from pulling off all those manuals and special moves. The other day, GameFan Online editor Hi-Fi walked into our office and just held up his thumb (the secret *Tony Hawk* greeting). Nodding in turn, we showed off our battle-damaged thumbs... wearing it proudly like a badge of courage (or Sausage loserdom, though we tend not to look at it that way).

Unfortunately, we're not the sharpest tools in the shed. For almost a week, we were constantly fighting over possession of the single Dual Shock controller. "Gimme that! I can bust 150 in New York!" "Hand it over, you gimp." "C'mon, don't bogart the Hawk!" Then one day, it dawned on us... multi-player! Duh! After that miraculous discovery, the world was a better place. Twice as many of us could get our Hawk on, and with Kid Fan's recently donated big screen to play on (51" of gaming glory), the split-screen wasn't that bad.

GameFan's
Box-O-Fun

GameFan's Compendium of Bad Addictions

It was during an all-nighter for this issue that we realized that many of us here at *GameFan* have addictions. Some more than others, but nearly all of us have crutches that we lean upon, especially in time of need (such as late-night crunch time). Just for fun, we decided to compile a list (since those are the easiest space-fillers to come up with in a short amount of time) of the various addictions that each staff member has:

Kodomo — Master of Addictions. No one comes close to this chain smokin', Red Bull drinkin', pill-poppin' mess. If he tries to quit smoking, he gets through the day by upping his dose of addictions elsewhere. Couple this unhealthy diet with marathon game sessions of *Quake*, *Worms*, and *EQ* that last till early morning, and you have a pretty 'shaky' lifestyle.

ECM — As if his eBay addiction, online stockbroking, and desire to own every Saturn shooter ever made weren't enough, ECM is looking into acquiring some medicine which happens to have side effects such as... weight loss and... oh, instant death. Did I mention he's also a chronic insomniac?

Eggo — Though he was finally able to "get off the sauce" by ditching his soulmate, *Diablo 2*, he only ended up replacing it with another online addiction in *NFL2K1*.

Fury — If it has Treasure or Sonic Team on it, nothing will prevent Fury from adding it to his collection. Money is not a problem when it comes to his true loves. Just look at his eagerness to spend $200 on a sealed copy of *Radiant Silvergun*... a game he already owns!

The Judge — His *EverQuest* exploits have been well-documented in the pages of this mag before. Everything from being a brewer to starting a guild to his own *EQ* webpage shows that his madness knows no bounds.

Chicken
of the Month

Did we mention that Capcom is our favorite company? Not only do they continue to pump out quality titles which have an emphasis on gameplay, but they're also one of the few companies that supplements great games with awesome chicken as well. There's only one thing better than receiving a comp copy of a cool game in the mail, and that's receiving a remote-controlled dinosaur with a cool game in the mail. This *Dino Crisis 2* package comes complete with a boxed copy of the game and a promotional video to impress your friends. With Tyranosaurus roaring action and the kung-fu grip, the only thing missing is a nerf shotgun, so you can get Regina on that dinosaur butt.

<Sigh> If only every game came with a remote-controlled dinosaur, there would be much less hate out there. If everyone were given the chance to play with toys like this, it would alleviate so much unneccessary stress in the world. Unfortunately, not everyone is on Capcom's comp list, and there's only so many remote-controlled dinosaurs to go around. At least we've got ours!

Sausage
of the Month

Alex Robinson, you're the last Sausage of the Month of the year. Your dedication to video games and anime is so noteworthy, we had to immortalize your collection within these pages. Alex has been a long-time *GF* reader who owns nearly every system dating back to 16-bit. His favorite games are *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Final Fantasy 3*, *Skullmonkeys*, *Star Ocean 2*, and *Legend of Dragoon*. He also has a video game memorabilia collection, with items dating back to the Atari days. Also, he and his friends have formed an anime club. Check out the wall of characters they drew too! Now that's sausage material if I've ever seen it. If you want to be selected as GameFan's Sausage of the Month, show us your dedication by sending a picture and brief story to Posty's mailing address (found at the back of the book), and you too could have your name in lights!

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PLATINUM SERIES

Dreamcast.

GA GAME ARTS

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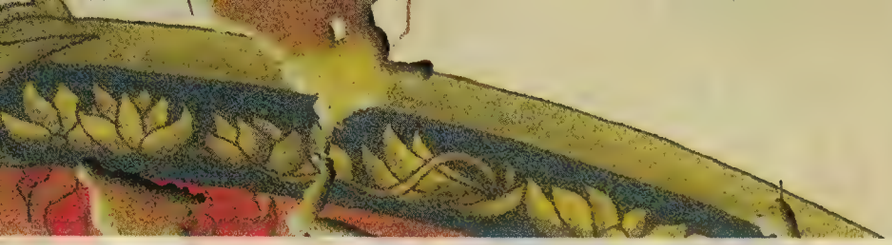
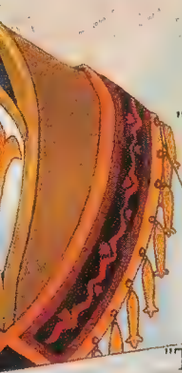


"The level of detail paid to every single moment, circumstance and environment is overwhelming."
Official Dreamcast Magazine

"...undeniably the prettiest role-playing game ever to grace a console."
www.dailyradar.com

"...this will indeed be the first epic RPG on Dreamcast."
www.ign.com



"Grandia II is easily the most impressive next-generation RPG we've seen, and the first true RPG epic for a next-generation console."
www.thegia.com

"Take a new look at what is surely the best-looking RPG yet on a next-generation console..."
Gamer's Republic Online

"...set to give sub-par developers a lesson in how to do a DC RPG right."
GameFan Magazine

"Any RPG fan would be insane to miss out on this fantastic gameplay experience and it could go far in converting those who previously rode the RPG fence."
GamerWeb.com

"If you want your copy of Grandia 2 this holiday season, don't expect Santa's little elves to make you a special copy, pre-order it now or you may not get it until late January."
www.GA-Console.com

Critically acclaimed and over 2 years in the making, Grandia™ II arrives December 2000.

GRANDIA II

Only on Dreamcast™

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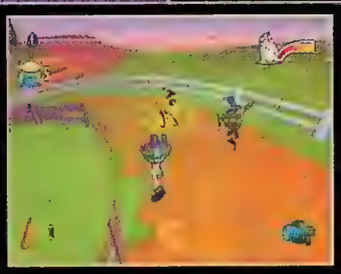
Viewpoint

G / Graphics
C / Control
P / Play Mechanics
M / Music
O / Originality

ECM | Eggo | Fury | Kodomo

Game of the Month
Zelda: Majora's Mask



Buzz Lightyear
Dreamcast
Activision
Racing

"Hi, I'm Buzz Lightyear and I'm a port. Feel free to heap derision and insults upon my licensed crown"—don't mind if I do, Buzz... Really, though, if you're over the age of 10 and you're playing this, you should really think about getting another hobby. A game that doesn't even begin to tax the DC hardware-wise rife with slowdown and ugly, repeating textures? Gameplay (if you can call it that) that consists of running into the screen, blasting poorly rendered enemies and generally hoping the pain will end... soon. You should stay far away from this agonizing 'effort'—and so should your little brother.

G 6
C 5
P 4
M 6
O 4
55

Travelers Tales are at it again folks, and I've got to say that this is perhaps there worst endeavor since *A Bug's Life* on PS. First, what could have feasibly been a decent action game instead turned into ridiculous races to the end of each level (where a stupidly simple boss waits for a two second battle). To make matters worse, you have to concern yourself with collecting coins to access weapons, hover boards and automatic jump ramps that send you flying into otherwise unaccessable areas. But get this, the hover board can't even glide across a small ravine... how lame! Pixar Studios would not be proud.

G 6
C 4
P 4
M 7
O 3
50

Ack (doing best Bob the Cat impression)! What happened, with a promising license and the opening of *Toy Story 2* to work with, you get a steaming pile. The game is almost entirely running into the distance (with battles at the end), and it's just implemented poorly. Forget the fact that you press up to make vehicles go and collect money for items, I'm talking you doing the same level 5 times to collect 'special icons' so you can move on to new levels. This game is just lame, so bad, I can't even tell if Buzz is cel shaded or not. Well, sorry Buzz, even Tim Allen had the good sense to avoid this pile.

G 9
C 5
P 6
M 6
O 5
65

Jet Grind Radio
Dreamcast
Sega
Action
Kodomo's Score: 97
Reviewed pg. 75

OK, this one automatically scores a few points due to the inclusion of a US-only (till, of course, SoJ releases *JSR: USA*, <wince>) NY level. The new tunes, however, are another story—while I can't say I'm a mammoth J-pop fan (that's putting it mildly), I will say that the Rob Zombie (among others) tunes just don't fit the very cartoony nature of this game. However, it's still a great game, even though they didn't (why not, Sega?) fix the camera/tag button combo attack (ewww). Now hopefully this game sells the numbers it deserves unlike in Japan where they've forgotten what a good game is.

G 10
C 8
P 8
M 9
O 10
91

After hearing that Sega was going to muck with the godly soundtrack for the US version of *Jet Grind*, I was certain I'd be lowering the 95 score I gave the import rev. I mean why Rob Zombie out of all people... are the folks at SOA even playing the same game as I am? If so, they'd know that some heavy metal death beats are no substitute for some groovin' J-pop. Surprisingly though, almost everything remains intact here, with the new tunes restricted to just the newly added New York stage. So am I to get this right, for once Americans are getting the better package?! Finally, localization gets a step in the right direction.

G 10
C 9
P 9
M 9
O 9
96

I am the first to admit when I'm wrong, and this is a perfect example. Prior to playing *JGR*, I said that (Rob) Zombie's music belonged in any game (he's like Jell-O, there's always room for Zombie, right?). Unfortunately, his heavy metal bass riffs just don't belong in Sega's cel-shaded wonder. The new U.S.-exclusive level is surprisingly large, and my favorite J-pop tunes from the import make a welcome return as well. Other than that, this is the same game I gave a 90 earlier. If you held off on tagging an import copy, make sure you play the U.S. rev. Remember kids. Graffiti is art, but graffiti as vandalism is a crime!

G 9
C 7
P 8
M 9
O 9
91

Looney Tunes Space Race
Dreamcast
Infogrames
Racing
Logi's Score: 85
Reviewed pg. 74

Cel Shading, it's the lens flare of 2000 and set to be the most overused effect around. Thing is, it really makes Space Race feel cartoony and, along with the amazing idle character animations, puts the final product into a rare class on Dreamcast. Unfortunately, the thrill of the race just isn't there, even when you've got multiple characters just waiting for one screw up to pass you. I was particularly impressed with the levels design, but the lack of interactive environments (not counting turbo up a jump) for shortcuts was a little weak. Worth a look and good enough to kill at least one weekend.

G 10
C 8
P 8
M 7
O 8
81

I tell ya, Melbourne House definitely has a way with the power VR chip— between TD Le Mans and LTSR, were talking two of THE best looking DC games to date! While LTSR isn't you're typical Kart racer on the surface, incorporating rocket bikes similar to Jet Moto instead of standard kart vehicles, the insipid rubber band AI lands this one right alongside games like Mario Kart 64. But regardless of the AI, which really makes the first two rounds of a three lap race pointless, the backgrounds are so ridiculously animated that you'll look past any major discrepancies. Too bad all the madness keeps the frame rate down.

G 9
C 8
P 7
M 6
O 8
87

Damn, I was really excited about this one. *Space Race* was awesome in its preview form—the game that *Wacky Races* should've been. But then Melbourne House had to muck with a winning formula and add rubberband AI to the mix. While not as bad as *WR*, it's still a downer to be in first place, only to be tumbled down a few spots in seconds because you were doing too well. Other than that, *Space Race* is a winner on all other levels: graphics, environments, level design, and control. It's just now this game is relegated to must-rent status instead of must-buy. Any Sega fan worth his salt should play this.

G 9
C 8
P 8
M 7
O 6
82

This game is AWESOME!!! Not since the glory days of *RC Pro Am* has there been a radio-controlled car game of this order—the other 'De Go' games are kinda' stupid, but this is fun, fun, fun! Take your RC car down to the track and race it for points to upgrade your car, unlocking new tracks, new bodies (ambulance, hot rod... sumo?!), etc. In fact, this is probably the best game I've played all month—anything that you start playing at 2 AM and play till 10 AM must be something special. Too bad this Taito-developed beast will be over-shadowed by *ReVolt 2* and the like—nice pick up, Acclaim!

G 7
C 8
P 10
M 6
O 10
94

Wow, this might be one of the most novel concepts to come along in some time. Yes, playing the game did give me a heavy *RC Pro Am* vibe, but that's a good thing. You have the view from the stands, meaning it follows the car around the track. The controls are good (remember, no brakes on a RC car) and it's quite a fun game. With both Offroad and Street racing, there's more than enough to keep it interesting. On top of that, it's pretty tough to get far into the game (another plus), even when you master "nitro out of corners." As far as racing games go, it's unique, fun and definitely a winner.

G 9
C 8
P 8
M 9
O 6
87

"PULL!" Just as I was about to squeeze the trigger and shoot down any chance this game had of selling, I played it... and my whole world was turned upside down. Math wasn't my strong point in college, but I could do simple arithmetic: Acclaim + R/C cars = *ReVolt* < Good Game, right? Well, while that theory generally holds true, *RC de Go* is NOT *ReVolt*. It's more of a cross between *RC Pro Am* and *Micro Machines*. The graphics aren't the greatest, but the whole design is very cute. Controls are a bit simple: accelerate (note: no brake on an RC car) and turbo, but this game is a lot of fun. A definite sleeper hit!

G 7
C 7
P 9
M 7
O 6
86

RC De Go
PlayStation
Acclaim
Racing

Repeat after me: I love Sonic Team; Sonic Team can do no wrong... got that? Good, because this is something decidedly different from Naka and co. Maraca-swinging, hip-shaking action is yours for the taking—the only problem? ECM doesn't dance... or shake... and I especially don't swing, <shudder>. However, it is fun once you give it a shot (please, no more online videos of svelte-challenged people shaking their 'thang'). All the tunes are back, too bad some of them are covers of a certain Sony artists songs (wonder why that is...). Good songs, great graphics, and a monkey in the lead role? Oh yeah!

G 9
C 7
P 7
M 8
O 10
84

And I thought *Chu Chu Rocket* wasn't your typical Sonic Team release... man, talk about broadening your horizons! Ok, so I was skeptical going in but charm is a tough thing to ignore and *Samba* is chock full of enough charm and personality to disguise the fact that this is really nothing more than Simon Says. And like in any good Sonic Team game, the cast of dancing monkeys and other LSD-inspired performers are instantly likeable and bring up thoughts of a Saturday morning *Samba* cartoon. But if it's a question of replay value, I can't see gamers busting this one out unless you got chicks over and we know that ain't happenin'!

G 9
C 7
P 8
M 9
O 8
90

I picked up three things during my first trip to Japan: an inflatable Cactrot, Samba fever, and... well, I'm not supposed to talk about that last one. As for Sonic Team's dancing monkey, I made friends with it long before word ever reached the U.S. Of course, I was devastated upon finding the Ricky Martin songs missing from the import DC release (hey, I'm no RM fan, but you don't butcher a music game by taking away two of the most recognizable songs). Thankfully, Sega managed to hire Rick-E Martin to cover those songs for the American release. Sweet! Time to start shakin' my ninja booty. <shake> <shake>

G 10
C 7
P 9
M 10
O 9
95

Samba De Amigo
Dreamcast
Sega
Music

Visually stunning and in a graphical league of it's own, *Shenmue* redefines maddening attention to detail. Unfortunately, it isn't fun. I'm going to stop way short of hailing it as the best game ever, and simply say that it's a beautifully rendered tech demo with some fights, races and a whole lotta walkin' and talkin'. Life is generally a boring thing, with much down time between events and this is no different. Still, the atmosphere does help to suspend disbelief (even if people fade in/out and forget a lot), but why sit through the tedious moments when you can jump to *F355* or *Virtua Fighter 3* just as easily?

G 10
C 7
P 4
M 7
O 10
73

Yu Suzuki and co. have managed to pull off a visual tour de force that will certainly bring PS2 faithfuls back down to earth. But at what price does an insane level of realism and depth come by? Unfortunately in this case, it gives way to some rather boring gameplay. Understand that I'm not referring to the *Dragon's Lair*-esque elements here, 'cause they're just one of the game's many available play mechanics. Rather, I'm speaking about the times when you'll find yourself waiting till morning (or night) to access certain areas. So what do you do with a few virtual hours to kill? How about playing a more exciting game?

G 10
C 7
P 9
M 8
O 10
80

Dating back to E3, I didn't understand why people were so jazzed about *Shenmue*. Sure, it's got the best 3D graphics and environments that a game has ever seen, "But what about the gameplay?" I asked. Throwing darts and *Dragon's Lair* does not a good game make. This remains the best looking playable tech demo to date. However, as a game, I wouldn't tell anybody to buy it. If you're really curious, spend some cash on a rental only. The story doesn't wrap up, as it leaves it open for the second chapter, and the pace through most of the game is pretty slow. Maybe Chapter 2 will have more gameplay... but I doubt it.

G 10
C 7
P 4
M 8
O 9
78

Shenmue
Dreamcast
Sega
Adventure
ECM's Score: 70
Reviewed pg. 66

"Your call cannot be completed as dialed, please hang up and try again."—and that in a nutshell is what damns *Spawn* to hell. No SegaNet play?! This game was designed with multi-player in mind from the outset, and they decide to release it sans 'net play? What? Couldn't hold it till next year and release *Gunbird 2* and/or *Cannon Spike* in its stead? The graphics still look good, and if you can tolerate the split screen mode (many blessings upon your house if you can) you'll find some joy here, but a game that should be net playable (and a *O3A* beater at that—oh yes, but you'll never know) you won't.

G 9
C 8
P 5
M 6
O 8
68

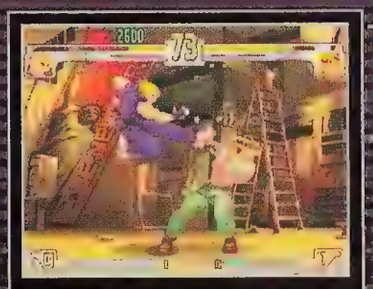
While I absolutely love the look of Capcom's *Spawn*, this game should have been crafted as a beat-'em-up from the get go (does anyone else recall when Capcom was the king of the beat-'em-up?)! But I suppose, with the success of PC games like *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake II*, Sega execs wanted an arena-style game for the DC (hmm, isn't that what *Outtrigger* is?). But the problem with *Spawn* is that it doesn't support Seganet. So what could have been a really fun online multiplayer game has now been reduced to a bot fest... uhh, no thanks. I'm sure diehard *Spawn* fans will have fun, but for how long?

G 9
C 7
P 7
M 6
O 6
79

I'm all for jumping into the wonderful world of fragging, but *Spawn* does nothing to beat the shooting games out already. The camera is shaky to say the least and near impossible to get clean shots with when you play the split-screen multiplayer. Character balance is also off, giving a few (most notably the angelic characters) too much power. With any chance of net play *Spawn* rotting in hades at this moment (and the camera), you're left with a single player game that doesn't hold up over time. Sure, it looks good and is translated from the comic book in unprecedented style, but ages too fast.

G 8
C 7
P 8
M 6
O 6
77

Spawn
Dreamcast
Capcom
Fighting



Street Fighter 3rd Strike
Dreamcast
Capcom
Fighting

Street Fighter 3: Third Strike? But I just bought *Double Impact* <argh!> Yes sir, Capcom does it again and releases a minor upgrade packaged as a whole new game! Its not that I don't love *SF*, it's just how many versions I can realistically afford? And not to mention the fact the character models are surprisingly pixelated... wassup with that?! Aside from a bit of pixelation though, we at least get new fighters (wow Chun Li, your looking pretty uh... buff?) and some cool new backgrounds to boot. But with the visuals in *DI* a bit sharper, and being able to select between *SF3* and *SF3: DI*, my *SF* plate is full.

G 8 C 9 P 8 M 8 O 10

86

Now, this, as opposed to *SFEX 3*, is how a *SF* game should be done. The same gameplay that made *SF* a legend returns (tweaked with the parries and taunts that actually have effects), and brings Chun Li along in tow. Only 2 things puzzle me. When characters look this good moving but look more pixelated and blown out than a NextGen screenshot, what happened? Second, given the fact that such minor upgrades have actually been done (Akuma's level 3 energy wave, for instance), why buy this over *Double Impact*? It's still a good game, but trails *DI* and I must recommend the latter as the must buy.

G 8 C 10 P 10 M 7 O 3

83

With the U.S. release of this game, I still find something wrong with it. This game isn't arcade perfect like *Street Fighter W* appeared to be. I'm not sure if it's the resolution or missing frames or what, but it just doesn't look right. I'm nitpicking a bit here, and any *SF* player who's gotta have his Chun Li should pick up *Third Strike*. I like all of the *SF3* games about the same (they're basically all the same game with minor tweaks and a few new characters), and considering *SFW* offers you two games for the price of one and doesn't suffer from 'that something wrong' feeling, I recommend that over *SF3:TS*.

G 8 C 8 P 9 M 7 O 2

84

Tony Hawk 2
Dreamcast
Activision
Skateboarding
Eggo's Score: 97
Reviewed pg. 78

You already know how I feel about the PS version, and the only difference here is that it's prettier looking. But if we've learned one thing, it's that graphics don't make a game, so don't go expecting a much higher score because of better textures. Still, if you aren't one of the million plus satisfied PS customers at this point, this is definitely the version to get. Smoother frame rates, sharper textures, and the same great soundtrack conspire to deliver a good solid game... that I'm not in love with like the rotten-toothed freak in the opposite corner. Good game, and hey, Spiderman's in there... and we didn't need a code to get him—you know who you are.

G 9 C 9 P 7 M 9 O 5

83

Yes, *Tony Hawk 2* was awesome on the PS, and yes it does look sweeter with the DC on the texture case, but aside from that we're really dealing with the exact same gameplay PS owners wound up with last month. But hey, not all games are fortunate enough to receive surgical enhancements like our buddy *Jet Grind Radio*. At least the quality in the PS *Hawk 2* was so profound that few gamers will likely complain about the lack of upgrades. And while I can't quite appreciate the level of addiction Kodomo and Eggo share for Neversoft's über sequel, I easily see this one outselling the first by a longshot.

G 9 C 9 P 9 M 10 O 7

92

Two numbers say it all: 12 and 100. Since jumping on the *THPS 2* bandwagon, I've slept 12 hours in 5 days and what's not to love? Levels that hide many secrets (gotta find the best line), special moves that are too cool and the rock-solid addictive gameplay that keeps me up all night. The manual might be the best idea yet, allowing you to make your own line and attach tricks. Level design is a bit spotty (New York is suspect), but I built my own instead in the Skate Park. Put the kids to bed and take the phone off the hook, it doesn't get any better than this (Spider-sense is tingling for hours of sheer fun...)

G 10 C 10 P 10 M 10 O 10

100

DOA2: Hardcore
PlayStation 2
Tecmo
Fighting

If I hadn't already played this game to death on Dreamcast, I might be more excited. But with an import DC version featuring slightly better graphics (love that image quality) floating around I can't recommend this one over it. However, if you do not own a Dreamcast, this is the only PS2 fighting game in town—forget about *SFEX* and *Tekken Tag*, this is where it's at. Tons of secrets; new levels (the dragon is sweet); and more balanced gameplay push this one way beyond its competition. And hey, if you're a lonely sausage, is there really any other way to fly? Built-in pillows are good, right?

G 9 C 8 P 7 M 7 O 7

89

It took years under ECM's tutelage to be able to dissect a game's graphics quite the way that boy can. But when it came to choosing the better looking version of *DOA2*, the choice was easy. Sadly the DC rev never came out in Japan, and since I generally buy imports, wound up purchasing the PS2 limited edition. And now it's the other way around—Japan gets DC *DOA2* and US PS2 owners are getting one as well. The catch is that both are souped up with new stages, costumes, etc. So then what, I buy a new version and then Tecmo releases *DOA2* Hyper Fighting? Fact is, it's worth a purchase only if you passed on the first *DOA2*.

G 9 C 8 P 7 M 6 O 6

86

I'd be more interested in this game and all its unlockable treasures if the import DC version weren't available right now. With all the anti-aliasing backlash swirling around the PS2, Tecmo decided to clean up the act a bit with the U.S. release. It's better in some levels, yet others are still as wavy as ever. I'll stick to the Japanese DC version, since the gameplay is identical, that one is a lot cleaner graphically, and they probably have just as many secrets/costumes between them. Though it's a bit simplistic, I prefer *DOA2's* 'reversal-fest' gameplay to *Tekken*, which has never been my cup of tea.

G 9 C 8 P 7 M 7 O 7

87

Midnight Club
PlayStation 2
Rockstar
Racing

While Rockstar scores big time with *Smuggler's Run*, *Midnight Club* is another story. Graphically, you'll see cleaner, faster and better looking visuals elsewhere, but, as with *SR*, the size of levels can't be beat (Manhattan and London). The car models do nothing to get beyond the *SF Rush* school, with many bland, rounded cars (which do actually show damage) in the game. The biggest problem was the fact that the game just wasn't fun, even with cars, pseudo-Fed Ex trucks and pedestrians to peg. 2 tracks just isn't enough, despite all the modes of play that lie within the game.

G 7 C 8 P 6 M 7 O 8

74

I don't think Rockstar intended on *Midnight Club* being at all like *Crazy Taxi*, but after a bit of play you will inevitably turn the game into your own twisted version of Sega's cab sim (last I checked, Eggo had mowed down six innocents). Why, because *MC* is sooo horribly boring (surrounded by some of the most bland textures I have seen on the PS2) that following the games instructions is a lesson in utter tedium. Obviously, Rockstar set out to create a huge environment (like in *Smuggler's Run*) but just forgot that they had to put a game somewhere in there. Impressive in size, but everything else seems to falter.

G 5 C 6 P 4 M 5 O 5

55

I can't believe Rockstar is publishing this so-called "game." So I'm driving along... I swerve into a building, and the collision detection suddenly takes a holiday. My car drops through the ground and I sink to the bottom of the ocean. Nice. Then the music doesn't load... Even worse, the gameplay is nonexistent in some of these modes. The most fun I had with *Midnight Club* was trying to run over pedestrians (which this game actually lets you do). Fun, but not worth spending money on. Shoddy games like *Midnight Club* (which is more like a bad tech demo) give the PS2 a bad name.

G 8 C 6 P 1 M 4 O 7

47

"So, you're supposed to be an RPG, eh? Hmmm, funny, you look an awful lot like a fancy digital comic underneath that fancy RPG dress... Let's take a look, shall we?" <RIP> "Yep, thought so." What we have here, people is a digital comic masquerading as an RPG... nothing more, nothing less. Oh sure, it *feels* like an RPG, but after a few hours of non-interaction coupled with the 'go to a menu and re-start the battle' action, you'll wise up. Sure, it looks pretty (in parts... but ease up on the bloody motion blur—my head's starting to hurt) but when it all comes down to it, it's more like *Snatcher* than *FF*.

G 8
C 4
P 3
M 6
O 7

60

I swear, there must be a guy who drives around to fast food chains, goes to the drive through windows and then hires whoever's on the other end for voice acting in games. If you don't believe me, take *Orphen* for example. Not only are the voices completely unsuited for the roles, their mouths are so out of sync that it reminds me of a bad chop-socky flick. Well, at least we can turn to the gameplay to make up for... eh, what's this? A digital comic, huh? Wow, and a bad one at that (*D2* blows this one away!). Please tell me at least the battle system is cool... uhh, why did the fight just reset when I tried to heal myself?

G 7
C 6
P 5
M 6
O 5

61

Developers, enough with the motion blur effect! It wasn't even cool the first time we saw it. Now, games like *Orphen* are abusing the technique to the point that it's mind-numbing (*DoA2's* last boss is also guilty). As for the rest of the game, it's a graphic adventure with really nice graphics. The synchronization between dialogue and character's mouths could be better, as could the voice talent, but these is just nitpicking. *Orphen's* big downfall is there's very little game here. It's more of a story (and not a very good one) with minor gameplay sections, which are pretty shallow. It's pretty, but no thanks.

G 9
C 6
P 4
M 7
O 8

66

Orphen
PlayStation 2
Activision
Adventure
Kodomo's Score: 65
Reviewed pg. 90

Guess what? I didn't like the arcade game. Now if you take away the coolest part of a lackluster game (the bitchin' gun with scope) you're left with a shell of a game that most will play once and never touch again. It's really too bad we won't see a peripheral for this, cause it would have gone up big-time in my book if it had. As it is, it's something to play through maybe once, and then it's dust bunny fodder. As for the "should I get the DC or PS2 rev" well, if you must own this game, the DC rev looks slightly better... but I'd recommend you simply spend your money on something different altogether.

G 7
C 7
P 5
M 5
O 8

73

Wow, are we at last seeing an end to the one-time-use peripheral? If anyone thinks Konami couldn't have pulled off a home version of the sniper rifle they're smokin' paint (have you seen the crazy import DrumMania and BeatMania packages?!)! Nope, instead Konami just realized that it wasn't necessary and could replicate the same feel of the arcade piece using a pretty innovative control scheme. Visually, *SC* is identical to the stand up cabinet but understand that that's not really saying a whole lot. Graphic hounds will be disappointed but if you can look past appearances, *SC* is a blast...

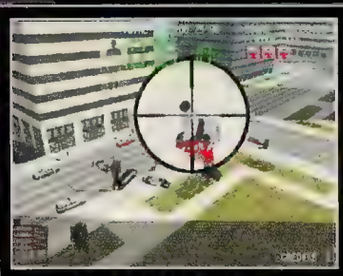
G 7
C 9
P 7
M 6
O 9

89

I've never been a huge fan of console gun games and therefore wasn't expecting much from *Silent Scope*. However, once you actually play it, you'll discover that the game's very fun on console. Do not bash it until you try it! The concept is very simple, the controls are slick, and the gameplay can be surprisingly addicting. Anyone who says Konami needs to release a sniper gun peripheral (which will probably cost $150) is crazy. The Dual Shock 2 is all you need to enjoy this arcade classic at home. Any game in which you're given an extra life for staring at a scantily-clad babe gets points in my book.

G 7
C 9
P 8
M 7
O 9

87



Silent Scope
PlayStation 2
Konami
Gun Game
Kodomo's Score: 70
Reviewed pg. 92

This one came outta left field and I'm still scratching my super deformed head. Rockstar made this? With a novel concept, smooth framerate and fun action, *SR* puts a new twist on the racing/action games. Start anywhere, look 10 virtual miles into the distance, and, chances are, you can actually drive to that point. Yes, the levels are actually that large and well done, giving ample opportunity for every wannabe bootlegger to put some time in and find the best shortcuts. The only concern that I have is the few number of levels, but when they are this detailed, I guess it's a small price.

G 10
C 8
P 9
M 7
O 9

89

Even though *Smuggler's Run* and *Midnight Club* are both Rockstar games boasting expansive environments, its hard to imagine that the two came from under the same roof. While I'm not going to harp any further on *MC*, players should NOT take the quality of that title as a sign of what to expect in *SR*. As Kodomo stated, you can literally see for miles in the distance (10 virtual miles go a long way on the PS2!) and for such an enormous playing field, the environments actually look pretty nice... packed full of detail. And to top things off, you play as a bootlegger! Virtual *Smokey and the Bandit*... yes please!

G 8
C 8
P 7
M 6
O 8

82

Compared to *Midnight Club*, *Smuggler's Run* is a superstar. But this superstar, like so many others before him, has fallen from grace. Troubled with some loose control (similar to Rally car racing) and never able to shake the reputation of having floaty physics, *Smuggler's Run* just couldn't stay at the top forever. Under the close scrutiny of the media's spotlight, this rockstar has realized his time has come and gone. If I ran into this game on October 26th, I would be very disappointed. The gameplay is a bit on the simple side and the fun factor is like a painkiller high... it wears off fast, right Fury?

G 9
C 5
P 7
M 8
O 8

74

Smuggler's Run
PlayStation 2
Rockstar
Racing

OK, Capcom, it is very cool that (like Namco and Sega) you took the time to repair an obviously flawed game—'props' for that. However, it still doesn't change the fact that *SFEX* games never have been—and at the rate they're going, never will be—as good as the 2D ones. With *Capcom vs. SNK* already floating around out there, this ranks way low in my book—and it probably will in yours despite how you feel about *CVS*. The characters still look like puppets (and in an age of PS2 games like *TTT* and *DOA2*...); the music is still poor and the characters designs, well, lame. I'm beginning to think Arika should concentrate on arcade *Tetris* games...

G 7
C 7
P 7
M 8
O 4

73

Credit where credit's due, Capcom actually spent time on this Arika-developed fighter and fixed the slowdown problems that plagued the Japanese final. You can now expect to see 4 characters fighting it out without slowdown and looking slightly crisper too. The problem is that *SF* was born a 2D game and should stay a 2D game. The training mode, along with the now standard fighting game feature of Tag Battles are adequately done, but there just isn't anything that you can't get better in *Tekken Tag* or *Dead or Alive 2* for the PS2. It's quite a frame upgrade, but, then again, that wasn't the major issue.

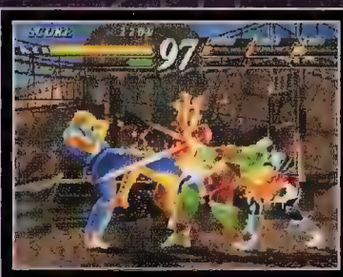
G 8
C 7
P 7
M 6
O 7

71

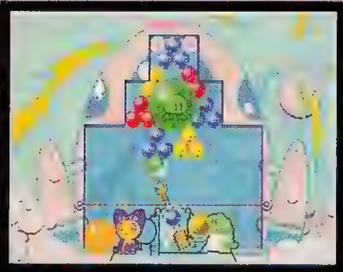
Capcom, you are a god. Taking a cue from Namco and Tecmo, Capcom has taken a flawed Japanese product and addressed the primary complaint people have had with it for the U.S. release. In this case, it's not jaggies, but slowdown, which really was disheartening to see in a next-generation console. With all of that slowdown gone (except for the 10 player madness at the end of the game), *SFEX3* is a much more polished product than it was six months ago. Given a choice between this and *DoA2*, I'd pick this simply because it's closer to *Street Fighter* (though this is not a **real** *Street Fighter* game).

G 8
C 7
P 8
M 7
O 6

88



Street Fighter EX3
PlayStation 2
Capcom
Fighting



Super Puzzle Bobble
PlayStation 2
Taito
Puzzle

Why is it that of the PS2 games available at launch, this is among the cream of the crop: that's right, a re-hash of a 6-7 year old Neo Geo game is one of the best PS2 games to date (domestic or otherwise)? Well, I'll just let you do the math on that one... after all, you're clever enough to figure that one out on your own. The graphics are revved up (no WinCE PC port shenanigans here) but it's the same game you've played a thousand times with some added features in the puzzle mode. Cool new characters to complement Bub and Bob round things out. Now please, give me a PS2 game worth talking about...

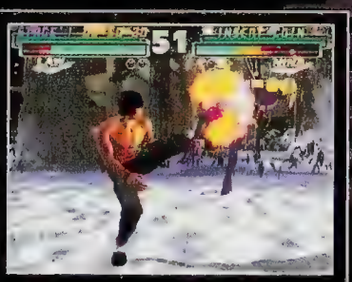
G 8
C 6
P 9
M 8
O 1
89

Bust-A-Move: the game that won't die! Yes sir, Taito keeps churning them out and each year the amount of innovation... err, lack of innovation keeps players a' coming. But what's this? Ahh, what pretty colors... I can't possibly look away! Ok, so at heart *Super Puzzle Bobble* offers nothing truly new, but the package is certainly nicer to stare at. The colors are ultra vivid here, and the new ensemble animates with (get this) more than two frames! In fact, at times they go totally crazy and with an almost cel shaded look, help to make this rendition of an old game appear pretty unique. Now, enough talk, I gotta practice...

G 7
C 8
P 8
M 6
O 6
82

I've always been a big fan of *Bust-A-Move*. To this day, it remains one of the best puzzle games ever created... simple, yet requiring thought, and quick reflexes. Not only is this the best puzzle game on PS2, it's one of the best titles in the launch lineup. However, I wouldn't tell someone to buy this game unless it had one thing: online play. I'll assume that fans of *BaM* already own a version of it on a previous console. If this is the case, there's no need to buy a PS2 and this game (even though it's a lot prettier) if you're going to play the same game. Is this why Sony needed all that processing power?

G 5
C 8
P 9
M 7
O 5
79



Tekken Tag Tournament
PlayStation 2
Namco
Fighting

So we meet again, my nemesis...Thanks to Eggo insisting that we cover this game again, here I am once again asking myself why? Why do people like this game? People like Kodomo that actually make the game look like it requires some skill, and yet, I care not. I'm a VF guy; always will be. The lethargic control (feels like I'm playing via remote control) has, does and probably always will (barring some miracle) remain the same. In the plus column , Namco did fix the aliasing, which is nice (but not on RRV, which really needed it, hmmm). Oh well, it gets a couple of points for the fix, but otherwise...

G 9
C 5
P 5
M 9
O 3
62

Lets be honest, without Namco's stellar lineup, the import PS2 would have definitely been up a certain creek. And ya know what, the same is really true of the US PS2. Sure, there are exceptions like AC2 and SSX, but the polished feel gamers expect from a next gen PS, is truly only evident in games like TTT and RR5. Imagine a cast of fighters that are actually better looking than the ones found in Soul Caliber and you have an idea of what to expect of Namco's latest Tekken. And if by chance the lack of anti-aliasing in the import version kept you at bay, rest assured that the US release is jaggy free!

G 9
C 9
P 8
M 8
O 6
94

You know where this one is going. Strange, the Anti-Sony camp's cries of "Tekken Jag Tournament" have all fallen silent, thanks to Namco's overhaul of the game. Gone are the 'jaggies' and cleaned up the visuals, giving you a better game than Japan had. While some of the 34 characters are merely combinations of others (as per every *Tekken*), the addition of rising lifters, tag throws, sidestep attacks and new moves, beefs it up to best PS2 game yet. 60 FPS glory, amazing characters and deep backgrounds (with floor still unattached) are but a few of the cool features. Now where's my brother TB?

G 10
C 10
P 10
M 10
O 7
98

Wild Wild Racing
PlayStation 2
Interplay
Racing
Kodomo's Score: 83
Reviewed pg. 94

Look, a racing game!!! On a Sony console—yeah, I almost can't believe it myself. And hey, it's not good... double shock! Really now, Rage needs to cut back on the engine design classes and take some game design classes. Like many of the other racers on PS2, this game feels like a tech demo... and it's not even a particularly good-looking demo—certainly hardcore Euro coders can do (much) better than this. Lackluster racing and some blasé physics conspire to create what is probably the worst PS2 racing game do date (well, next to *Driving Emotion*, that is). Next...

G 6
C 6
P 5
M 5
O 5
50

Rage Software, the kings of sub-par game design (*Incoming, Expendable*) returns with their attempt at the offroad racing scene. So what's the verdict on their first PS2 offering? Well I hate to say it, but thoughts of TNT's *Offroad Racing* come to mind. Sure, things seem innocent enough on the surface, with some pretty nice car models leading the way, but as soon as you take to the dirt is classic Rage syndrome—which translates to boring gameplay atop decent visuals... uhh correction, this one breaks the mold—the graphics are even decent at that. And what's up with static background... on PS2?

G 7
C 5
P 6
M 6
O 4
63

There's a million racing games coming out around the same time for PlayStation 2, and only *Ridge Racer 5* is worth the material its printed on. *Wild Wild Racing* has many positives going for it (a pretty good game engine, well-modeled cars, and skillful braking during the turns), but once you look past the shiny exterior, you're left with a run-of-the-mill average racing game that's not very fun and which doesn't inspire you to continue playing or come back for more. I prefer a mad power-sliding racer like *Ridge Racer* to a realistic, sim-my game like *WWR* in which you slow down to turn.

G 8
C 7
P 7
M 7
O 8
74

Army Men Air Attack 2
PlayStation
3DO
Action

if you've seen one *Army Men* game, you've seen them all, right? Well, don't expect anybody to reinvent the wheel here, you'll just get more of the same. Choose a side and battle it out through various locales (all massive compared to the *Army Men*) using helicopters to shoot, strafe or lift things away. The problem is, this game does very little to establish itself as a sequel, certainly nowhere near the level of upgrades that *THPS 2* does. At the end of the day, you already know what your going to get with *AMAA2*: decent visuals, mildly fun gameplay and something that you've already done before.

G 7
C 7
P 8
M 6
O 6
75

Poor 3DO... what a bad stigma, to be known for overusing the *Army Men* license long past its due lifespan. And truth is, there's a ton of excellent programmers over there who I know would produce amazing results if only they were only cut loose from the shackles of this license. But I digress... *AMAA2* alongside *AA: World War* is my favorite among the herd and I must admit, the wench mechanism can get a bit addicting. But unfortunately, most of the stuff here I already experienced in the original PS version and later on the N64 rev—this is 3DO's biggest problem... they just need an influx of fresh titles.

G 7
C 7
P 7
M 6
O 6
72

The *Army Men* franchise is one of my least favorite. What started out as a great idea has grown to the size of an empire for 3DO, who now feels the world can't get enough of the green and tan. I, however, have long ago lost interest in this series and its mediocre gameplay. Of all the *Army Men* games, *Air Attack* is actually the most promising. It tries to be different, offering unique, arcade-like gameplay. The sequel offers new environments and slightly improved graphics, but considering it's not a huge leap over the original (which wasn't a must-own game either), this one never rises above a rental.

G 8
C 7
P 7
M 7
O 7
79

I came to the abrupt conclusion this month, that I'm growing increasingly discontent with the state of the Japanese RPG. In fact, if I have to guide one more band of teenagers beyond this month's crop into the wilds to save the world from some diabolical menace, I'm going to fly to Japan and pummel the designers of these games. Worse yet? *BoFIV* isn't even a decently done game—which doesn't help in a month with the re-born *Final Fantasy* (conveniently located 2 VPs down). Sure, you can go fishing but that's small consolation in this snooze-fest. Pretty 2D graphics, though... <snore>.

G 8 C 7 P 5 M 6 O 5

66

Unlike the visually stunning *FF9*, whose graphics are actually enough to pull in an RPG novice like myself, *BOF 4* just doesn't draw my attention. Sure it's by Capcom which means some cool character designs, but the pace is sooo slow and the story is as dry as they come. Its sad that this series has really gone downhill since its introduction into the 32 era, especially considering the current crop of quality RPG's like *Chrono Cross* and *Grandia 2*. Capcom... no offense here, but sometimes it's best to let certain series remain in the past. A fresh start would be a welcome sight indeed.

G 6 C 6 P 7 M 6 O 5

63

This is not a good game. I know there's a cult following behind the *BoF* games (dating back to when Square had a hand in it), but these last two have been average **at best**. I played more *BoF3* than a person should, as I was slated to write a strategy guide for it, and let me tell you, that game was booooooring! The fishing mini-game was much more entertaining than the game itself. *BoF4* is hardly any different. The plot is the same old rehash, the characters are generic, the gameplay is old hat, and the fishing game is still the best part. Oh yeah, did I mention Square has a game coming out this month?

G 6 C 7 P 6 M 6 O 6

71

Breath of Fire IV
PlayStation
Capcom
Role-Playing
Kodomo's Score: 76
Reviewed pg. 96

I'm with Kodomo on this: I guess Crash has finally 'arrived.' Too bad I could no longer care less. See, these games are almost zero fun without friends and only fun for about 20 minutes with friends. That means that you aren't going to be getting much out of this game unless a) you're Fury and used to playing alone or b) Eggo and used to, uh, playing alone. Some decent graphics, but altogether really tired gameplay just makes me scream "Why, why do developers feel the need to incessantly rip each other off?" If someone comes up with an idea, you lose—get your own good ideas, dammit.

G 7 C 7 P 6 M 7 O 7

75

Though *Crash Bash* obviously follows the lead of *Mario Party*, it does away with the board game elements and instead concentrates solely on making some really cool mini games. I'm not talking about who can fill up a balloon faster or a bit of red light green light action, nope *Crash Bash* has an awesome version of four player table hockey and my personal favorite, riding atop polar bears while trying to knock opponents off a slick ice slab... hey, don't knock it till ya try it! But best of all, Naughty Dog didn't even craft this one yet it stays 100% true to the art style so familiar to the *Crash* world.

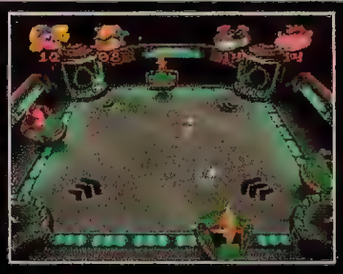
G 7 C 8 P 7 M 6 O 6

79

Apparently, you haven't made it as a mascot until you've appeared in 1) a platformer, 2) a Kart racer and 3) a party game. Of, course, this is Crash's #3 (golf and tennis coming soon), but does a decent job of biting the *Mario Party* style. Okay, originality is dead, but the massive amounts of minigames inside *Crash Bash* make for some well killed time. Despite a choice between Crash and 3 others (as well as 4 evil characters), most of the games are lacking. You'll wind up running around throwing boxes or playing a 'new' version of Warlords. It's good for a few weeks of fun, but tapers off.

G 8 C 7 P 8 M 7 O 5

75



Crash Bash
PlayStation
Sony
Party

The Fantasy is back! No more pseudo-sci-fi and/or angst-buried storylines, just good old fashioned, "Look ma—moogles!" gameplay'; Amano character designs; and even Nobuo sounds almost like his old self (though still not fit to hang out with *Tactics*' composer). While I'm still not a fan of the heavily cinematic experience, the much more light-hearted and endearing storyline, characters, and atmosphere didn't fail to bring a smile to my weather-worn face. Unfortunately this may be it for classic *FF*, as Amano is out for the next two chapters and sci-fi is poised for a return... enjoy it while it lasts—I know I will.

G 8 C 7 P 8 M 8 O 8

90

What's this, actual fantasy elements in my *Final Fantasy* game? Wow, what a departure from *VIII* which seemed so rooted in love triangles and soap opera turmoil. But perhaps the most noticeable difference is the look Square has crafted for this latest installment. I've got to admit, that for a guy who shies away from RPGs, the visuals alone (and believe it or not, I'm talking about the real time stuff here) make me want to step behind the controls. This of course can be attributed to the return of Amano's gorgeous character art. And to the music freaks out there, expect one of Uematsu's best scores to date!

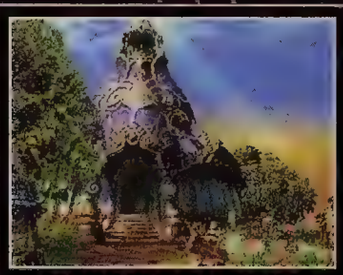
G 9 C 8 P 9 M 10 O 7

92

Well, well, well, Square returns to the roots that made it famous and actually produces a *FF* that is better than the last. Thankfully, the Junctioning system of *FF VIII* is gone, replaced by a Fantasy theme and some of the best CG cut scenes you're ever likely to see. Cut scenes can only get you so far, and the Amano designed characters and beautiful backgrounds will take you the rest of the way. Sadly, I didn't get to spend as much time with *FF IX* as I would have liked, so I don't know how it ends, but disc one was fun, sweet to look at and better than *FF 7*'s first. Best *FF* to date? No, but still good.

G 9 C 8 P 7 M 9 O 7

91



Final Fantasy IX
PlayStation
Square EA
Role-Playing
Eggo's Score: 96
Reviewed pg. 34

Ya know what? This is better than the DC game, <gasp>. Yes, that's right, I had more fun with a PS game than a DC game. Since this one isn't nearly as rubber-band prone as the DC rev, it wins—that's about all I have to say about that. Oh, and yes, both games are also completely different, with this one being the more 'cart' of the two, <double gasp>. Yep, I like the Kart antics featured here more than the arcadey DC game... too bad the PS game doesn't look as good, <sigh>. So yes, it's a decent little cart racer that makes me wonder exactly where the DC rev went wrong. Oh well, there's still *TD LeMans*... right?

G 7 C 7 P 8 M 7 O 5

76

Alright, so maybe were not dealing with the next coming of *CTR* here, but *Looney Tunes Racing* is by no means a bad kart game (if you can believe that following last months nightmare that was *Muppet Race Mania*). For starters, *LTR* is not a port of the DC game by Melbourne House. Instead, what PS owners get is a comical racer that doesn't attempt to create anything new but just focuses on cool level design (its all about Gossamer's castle!) and an interesting weapon system— players have to collect a number of tokens in order to access the CHEAP weapons—that helps to alleviate pesky rubberband AI.

G 6 C 7 P 8 M 8 O 6

84

After *Looney Tunes Space Race* on Dreamcast, I was expecting a huge disappointment in the PlayStation *Looney Tunes Racing* game. Surprisingly, *LTR* is actually pretty good. The sounds are nostalgic, the graphics are passable, but most importantly, the gameplay is pretty good. Rubberband AI doesn't mess things up, and this game has a powerslide like *Mario Kart*! I don't understand why other kart racing clones don't try to emulate the best out there. *Crash Team Racing* did it, and that's one of the few 'other' kart-racers worth owning. Some of the weapons are a bit cheap, but *LTR*'s still a lot of fun.

G 6 C 8 P 8 M 8 O 4

82

Looney Tune Racing
PlayStation
Infogrames
Racing

Rollcage Stage II
PlayStation
Psygnosis
Racing
Logi's Score: 78
Reviewed pg. 98

G 7
C 6
P 6
M 7
O 3

Psygnosis had a hand in this? That's why the *Wipeout* vibe is so prevalent... with similar courses, weapons, etc. Well, as this series goes on it does become more and more *Wipeout*, but pales in comparison. I don't know if it was the frame rate or effect that blurs and bends the view periodically, but I got a headache playing *RS2*, and that's never a good thing. The cars look pretty much the same, differing in ability only, and I have a hard time understanding what exactly you need to drive upside down in a short tunnel for. As far as racers go, it's average fare that gets old quick, making it rental material at best.

71

G 7
C 7
P 6
M 6
O 5

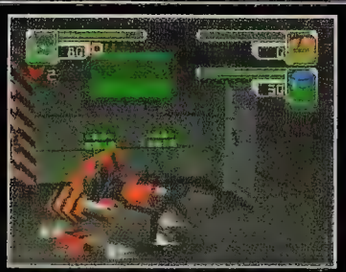
Anyone who spent more than five minutes with the original *Rollcage*, knows just how annoying it was when you got spun around... and believe me, it was a terribly often occurence. So at least that aspect of the game was rectified with *RS2*, but sadly the lack of fun was not. The visuals are dark like in the first '*Cage* and carries a very *Wipeout* like vibe but that's all the two games have in common. While a few of the weapons are cool, such as the laser spikes that stick out of your tires, the rest are basic fare like missiles. Still, it plays fast and adheres to a modest frame rate. Definitely better than the first.

73

G 6
C 7
P 7
M 6
O 7

The original *Rollcage* did little for me, and the sequel is much the same. In a way, it's more fun to play than *WipeOut*, but I'm not a big *WO* fan either. *RS2*'s graphics are ugly in today's day and age of racing games like *Gran Turismo 3* and *Tokyo Xtreme Racer 2*. Not that graphics are most important in a racing game, but *Rollcage* doesn't even offer much in the gameplay department. The racing on the walls and ceiling is gimmicky and unnecessary. The weapons and speed boosts make it interesting, but if I want weapons in my racing games, I'll play a kart racer or *Twisted Metal*.

74



Batman Beyond
Nintendo 64
Ubi Soft
Action
Judge's Score: 61
Reviewed pg. 122

G 4
C 4
P 3
M 4
O 6

We were recently having a discussion on just what other genres needed resurrecting (since we managed to revive the flagging shooter genre to some degree) and beat-'em-ups came to mind... but if games like this are any indication of where the genre might be going, well, let's just hope they go out quickly. This game is poor—beyond words. I think some DigiPen students, in their first year, churned this sucker out during summer break, cause that's the only way this is forgivable. Busted graphics, horrid gameplay (the first *Double Dragon* cripples this game), and another bad WB/DC license... at least Supes has some company now.

49

G 6
C 8
P 6
M 5
O 7

Talk about a game that could have been promising and just turns out crap, you've got *BB*. The cartoon this game's based on is good looking, angular and interesting. Problem is, the game is average looking, ridden with poor colors/bad palate and just not fun. I do like the idea that Bats has different costumes for differing effects (Nimble jumps higher, Offensive is stronger, etc), but the execution is lame. It's a beat-'em-up that can't even come close to *Streets of Rage* or *Final Fight*, and you speed the entire time doing the same thing over. If you're going to go for *Batman Beyond*, watch the cartoon.

70

G 4
C 5
P 5
M 6
O 6

This game's not very good. At first, I was comparing it to *Superman 64*, but the more I played *Batman Beyond*, the more I didn't want to stop. It's like a train wreck or a B-movie with horrible production values—you just don't want to walk away. The animation is lousy, the mission objectives are silly, the strategy is as basic as it gets... yet I still felt compelled to "Play on" as the game says. Don't get me wrong, I'm not recommending spending money on *Batman Beyond*. It's a terrible game, but if you were sentenced to play it for a day straight, it wouldn't be as bad as other punishments out there. It's mildly fun.

61

Donald Duck
Nintendo 64
Ubi Soft
Platformer

G 7
C 6
P 7
M 3
O 3

In a sick, twisted sort of way, I think I like *DD*—but for all the wrong reasons. See, I know this game is geared towards broken 5-yr.-olds, but I can't stop playing it. Hell, it's not even really fun. The problem is that there aren't 2D scrolling platformers anymore, and when even a marginal one comes in, I find myself hopelessly drawn in (shades of *Pac Man World*—Donald even has his own busted victory step) to a world of pallid graphics and monotonous gameplay. Still, I'm playing it so I'm either a. insane (very probable) or b. very desperate (also very probable). Either way, well, unless you fit in with me, stay far away.

80

G 9
C 8
P 8
M 7
O 7

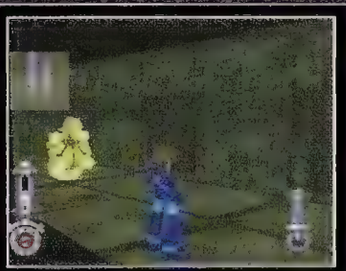
I'm not usually one to complain about a game being easy, but this is a cakewalk! While Ubi has done a fine job creating a *Crash Bandicoot* style game for the N64 (from forward scrolling to side scrolling and on) the amount of enemies is so scattered (and about as harmless as one of my own comebacks... "Oh yeah, well I hate you... top that!") that you'll think you've attained sacred ninja gaming skills. Surprisingly, the cinemas are really sharp and contain a good deal of voice (expect plenty of Donald's jibberish) but when you bump things up with the expansion pack, the frame rate flys south for the winter.

78

G 9
C 8
P 8
M 7
O 7

Donald's actually better than I thought it would be, with a mixture of different levels to keep things different. One level might be running towards the distance and the next is side scrolling platforming action (a la *Crash*). Unfortunately, you have to spend the entirety of the game finding parts for equipment to eventually save Daisy Duck from an evil Magician, and hunting games blow. On top of that, it's just too damn easy, slightly above *Kirby 64*. Still, the game does look good, moves fast and deserves a good look as it has a few new things to offer. It isn't the best of it's kind, but still good.

78



MegaMan 64
Nintendo 64
Capcom
Adventure

G 5
C 5
P 3
M 4
O 5

That's right, just what I wanted to see on my N64: a port of a 3-yr.-old PS game that isn't even as good as the original. Yep, a lower frame rate, blurry visuals, and Data the save monkey all hacked to pieces, well, this is just tragic. After all, I like these games on PS, but after seeing this atrocity, I'm almost compelled to swear them off forever... Why even bother doing this? If you're not going to even try (and believe me, those Digipen kids worked on this one too) why, well, bother? To milk some life from the completely depleted N64 3rd party scene. Grah, I expect much better from Capcom, <sigh>.

60

G 7
C 8
P 7
M 6
O 7

So let me get this straight, I waited this long for *MM* to make an appearance on the N64 and I get a frickin' port of a PlayStation game?! Now that might have been fine for *RE2* (who would have ever thought it would translate so well to a cart) but Capcom could have easily produced a 2D adventure for Nintendo... hey, they managed about a 100 plus *MM* games for the import PS. Look, the *Legends* series is cool and all, but this is the exact same game I played nearly three years ago. And what happened to the improved poly count? Fact is, this one is only good for newbies of the *Legends* series.

72

G 5
C 5
P 6
M 6
O 6

Quick formula for trouble by Capcom: "Let's make *Resident Evil* into a gun game!" Quick formula for trouble #2: "Let's take a dated PlayStation game which wasn't that good, port it to N64, and slap Mega Man on the cover." I didn't like this game when it was called *Mega Man Legends* on PlayStation. Considering it hasn't aged gracefully and the port doesn't offer much of an improvement, I like it even less now. The voice acting is bad, the camera moves so slowly that it hurts the gameplay, the controls are clunky, and the overall game is tedious instead of fun. *Mega Man* should have stayed 2D.

58

Hey look, more Ms. Pac Man—if we're really lucky we can review the DC rev next month, <blech>. Anyway, yes, it's the same game you may have played on PS and yes the usual rules apply: slightly blurrier graphics and weaker sound and/or music. I remember a time when there was something whispered about a Dream Team, but I think that it might just have been that, a dream. Still, it's still a fun little romp, and any console game the Judge actually spends 4-6 hours on generally can't be all that bad (emphasis on generally). A good little game, but how 'bout something just for N64 next time, Namco? Right...

G 7
C 7
P 7
M 7
O 7
81

Hey, look, here we are on another system, and we have the exact same game. Generally, this would be a bad thing, but *MPM* is actually a good game. Of course, expect the graphics to slip a bit if you compare this one to the Dreamcast, but the gameplay remains. Run around the 3D mazes, avoiding both foe and puzzled elements, while chomping pellets all the time. Musically, graphically and game play wise, it's better than I thought and worth a look. It might not be as cool as the Pac-Man car in *Ridge Racer V*, but it's still a good game and better than most.

G 7
C 8
P 8
M 6
O 7
82

Pac-Man World was a completely different game than *Pac-Man*, but *Ms. Pac-Man* on N64 IS *Ms. Pac-Man* the arcade game. It just looks different in 3D, but the gameplay is exactly the same. I enjoyed the gameplay differences of *PMW*, but *MPM* I have no desire to play. Even with updated graphics, the gameplay is a bit lacking these days. I'm sure the casual gamers will make this one a success, but I say avoid it at all costs. The arcade *Ms. Pac-Man* on turbo speed settings I would play, but not this uninspired rehash. Namco, if you're going to bring back the old, where is my update of *Dig Dug*?

G 7
C 7
P 5
M 7
O 3
72

Ms. Pac-Man
Nintendo 64
Namco
Puzzle

Oh how very sweet it is: despite having not been directly supervised by Shigeru 'I'm a god' Miyamoto, this game screams everything that makes Nintendo, Nintendo. A fantastic quest, with some of the most amazing gameplay ever. And while it can't measure up to *OOT* (c'mon, you can't expect miracles all the time—they only have so much magic dust), it is in a league of its own. The simple fact that it's now 4:30 AM and I plan on going home to play this game should scream volumes about this game. Needless to say, it's a better choice than PS2 come launch day—no question.

G 8
C 8
P 10
M 8
O 10
98

Few games have the consistent pull of Zelda, and that's the way it should be. But be warned, don't expect *Ocarina of Time*. This time out, Link's gotten into a darker and more detailed adventure. Hoping to prevent a moon from destroying the planet. The first few hours might be a little tough at first (think of Bill Murray's *Groundhog Day* plight), but the game picks up when you start to get magic masks (Deku, Zora, Rabbit). Although Miyamoto didn't design the game, it lives up to the fine Zelda legacy that he's built up: Simple controls, secrets to find, better visuals than ever before and fun that'll last a long time.

G 10
C 9
P 10
M 9
O 10
95

Majora's Mask is not what I expected. Unlike *Ocarina of Time*, this game is a lot darker, ambiguous, and full of secrets. I'll take *OOT* over *MM* any day, simply because it's more straightforward. Running around while the world comes to an end because you don't know where to go is not my idea of a good time. It's not a bad game, but I'm not sure if it lives up to the legacy of the previous *Zelda* games. Maybe it's because Miyamoto wasn't heading up this project; it feels like it's missing that special something... that intangible which separates a game from being great or a classic.

G 9
C 9
P 8
M 9
O 9
90

Zelda: Majora's Mask
Nintendo 64
Nintendo
Adventure
Fury's Score: 98
Reviewed pg. 118

Let's get this straight, *Gundam* games have the dubious distinction of only being worse than *Macross* games, and that's a bold statement. Hmmm... *G-Saviour* has very little that jumps up and screams Emotion Engine, with average graphics, bad music and gameplay that sucks the fun right out of you. The main problem is that, Gundam License aside, you'll find nothing that *VOOT*, *AC2* or a myriad of other Mech games won't excel at, and put in fun. I don't know what kind of kick Eggo's on, but there's nothing here that you haven't seen before or, sadly, won't see again very soon.

G 7
C 8
P 7
M 5
O 6
72

G-Saviour is much like EA's *X Squad*, in the sense that both games are quite basic in scope but deliver enough quality (hardly no thought involved) action to sustain a bit of temporary play. But understand that when I say no thought involved, I mean it! Enemies and bosses are about as intelligent as a certain Vice Presidential candidate and the graphics are really just OK by PS2 standards. Personally, I wouldn't even use the words *VOOT* in the same sentence with... ahh, thought you almost had me there didn't you... clever bastards! Still, this one is ideal for a rental and especially if you're a fan of Gundam.

G 6
C 8
P 5
M 10
O 6
69

I'll take a lot of flak for this, but I like *G-Saviour* to a degree. It's no *Virtual On: Oratorio Tangram*, but it's the most fun I've had with a *Gundam* game to date. The play mechanics are quite simplistic, but at least you can fly or stomp around shooting things and dodging bullets while everything else blows up. The graphics are alright, the music is forgettable, but *G-Saviour's* fun in an 'I'm ashamed to like it' sort of way. I wouldn't recommend a purchase, but mech-loving *Gundam* freaks could find some enjoyment in this as a rental. I did. Now it's back to *VOOT*... ECM, where'd that link cable go?

G 7
C 8
P 6
M 6
O 7
74

G-Saviour
PlayStation 2
Sunrise Interactive
Action
ECM's Score:55
Reviewed pg. 138

I'm not the biggest shooter fan round these parts (well, I am taller than all of them), but I know quality when I see it. I'm still looking. *Silpheed* looks good, but some of the backgrounds give off a shimmering effect and I swear I saw mass repetition on the Lava stage. I like my shooters fast and furious, and this is like the slow methodical, deliberate pace. Do not expect to get into battles like in most of the Capcom shooters as of late, with 200 bullets coming at you and only one way out. Bottom line, it looks good, is way too easy and comes no where near the intensity and action that shooters need.

G 8
C 7
P 6
M 8
O 7
74

There is no such thing as a sure think... you want evidence, how about *Silpheed* for PS2? First it's Treasure developed, second its powered by the much touted Emotion engine and third, it's a remake of one of THE best <looking, not playing> Sega CD games made. So why am I left disappointed?! Sure, there is the whole issue about GameArts hampering Treasure's creative flow, but that's not entirely why I'm disappointed. All that poly crunching power at hand and we get one of the most slowdown ridden PS2 games available—generally a death cry for shooters! And no bomb option... Ma, get my gun!

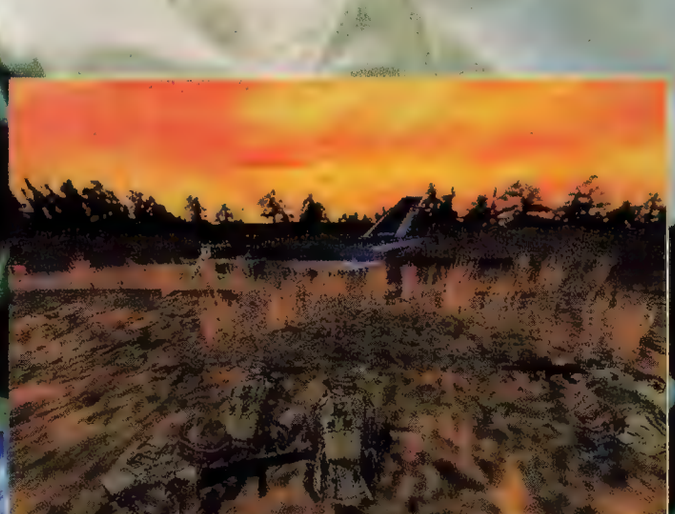
G 9
C 7
P 5
M 7
O 6
76

When I heard everyone moaning how bad this game was, I thought they were overreacting... until I played it. Then I was the one moaning. Hard to believe that Treasure would put out such a boring game as *Silpheed*. There is nothing going on here. I didn't come close to dying until the fifth level boss or so. There's no bullet-dodging, no action... just a lot of pretty eye candy and some enemies recycled from *Radiant Silvergun* (so much for Treasure's "no rehash" principle, eh?). Newbies or the blind might enjoy this game, but I'll never play it again. Maybe Working Designs can make it tougher.

G 9
C 7
P 2
M 7
O 6
68

Silpheed
PlayStation 2
Capcom
Shooter
ECM's Score:58
Reviewed pg. 136

ONE SHOT



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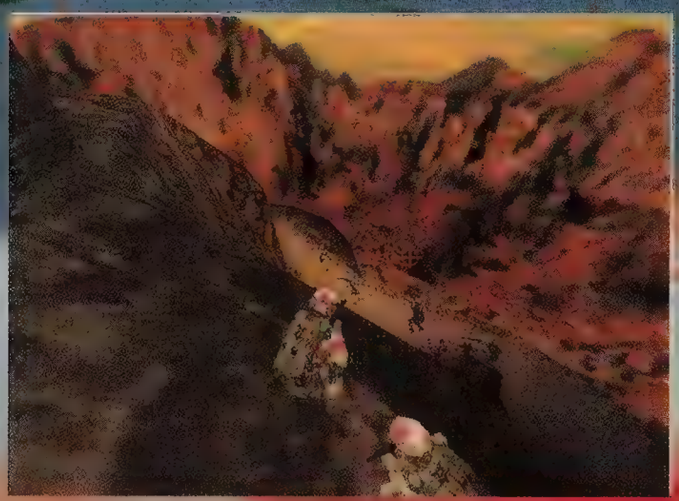

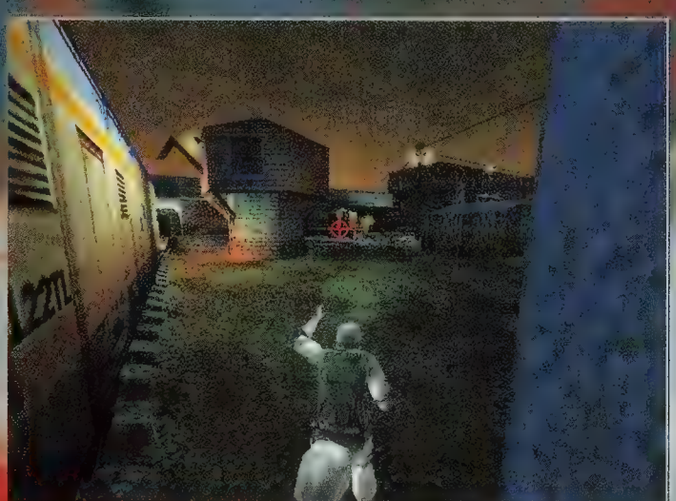

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Dreamcast.

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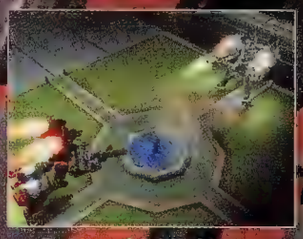

Replays highlight your destructive kills

Customize your A.C. for maximum damage

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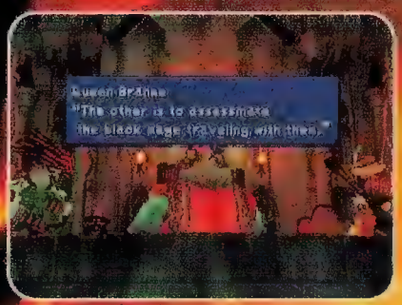
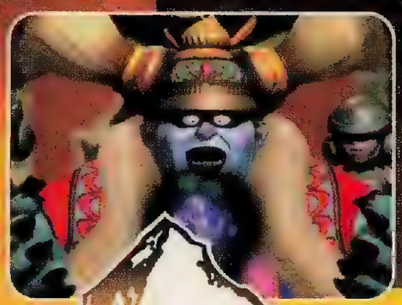




Home Sweet Home

I feel as if I've spent the past six years on a journey around the world. Touring the countryside and living life, I've been to the sunny beaches of Costa Del Sol, seen the exotic secrets of the Orient in Wutai, and even experienced the cold clutches of outer space. But after all this adventuring, all these new places, I'm finally returning home... and I can't wait. Perhaps it's more accurate for me to say *Final Fantasy* is returning home... to a land of crystals, airships, knights, and dragons. It's refreshing to once again see moogles and opera houses, as opposed to motorcycles and music concerts. I prefer my battles fought with swords and sorcery, not machine guns and five-minute summon spells. *FFIX* is a triumphant return to the series' medieval setting—a giant "Welcome Back" party, if you will, and everyone's invited (even you jaded guys). So join me in this tour of Square's finest *Final Fantasy* on PlayStation...

VIII *Is Not Enough*

If you recall, we were the only major video game pub in the States to slam *FFVIII*. Our competition went on and on about how it was the best RPG of the year, the greatest *Final Fantasy* ever, an epic masterpiece... On the other hand, I found many things wrong with *FFVIII*: uninspired music, a tedious junctioning system, disagreeable characters, an incoherent storyline, and an unappealing, futuristic setting. Apparently, I wasn't the only one who had problems with *VIII*. Many of Square's fans were outraged in Japan, which is why *FFIX* is a return to what made the series popular: fantasy. Try to put the last game out of your mind. *Final Fantasy IX* will remind you what this series is capable of: charming characters, lighthearted atmosphere, a well-told story, and superb gameplay.

FINAL FANTASY IX®

Characters You Care About

Yoshitaka Amano has returned in the role he was born to play: *Final Fantasy's* character designer (sure, he also did *Gatchaman/Battle of the Planets*, *Vampire Hunter D*, and *Front Mission*, but none of those are as popular as *Final Fantasy* these days). His very unique art style and creative imagination are just what this series has been lacking of late. Amano makes all the difference. No offense to Tetsuya Nomura (character designer for *Parasite Eve 1* & *2* and *Final Fantasy VII* & *VIII*), but his realistic character designs are better suited to games with a modern look, such as *Parasite Eve*, not those set in a fantasy world like *Final Fantasy* (I don't know about that PS2 Disney game either, but that's a whole 'nother story...). Getting back to the characters in *IX*, not only does Amano make them personable by design, but the script fleshes them out as well. By the end of the second disc, you have a complete understanding of each and every character: their motivations, the way they relate to others, and their mindset. Sure, there's only eight main characters, but at least they aren't faceless and underdeveloped like countless other RPGs.

REVIEW

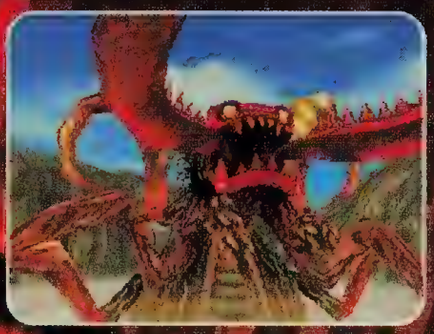
EGGO: THEY PUT THE "FANTASY" BACK IN *FINAL FANTASY*...

DEVELOPER - SQUARESOFT
PUBLISHER - SQUARE EA

1 PLAYER
AVAILABLE NOW

VIEWPOINT SCORE: 96

PlayStation

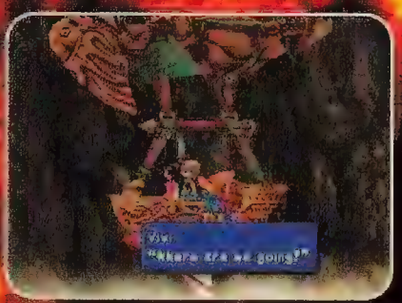


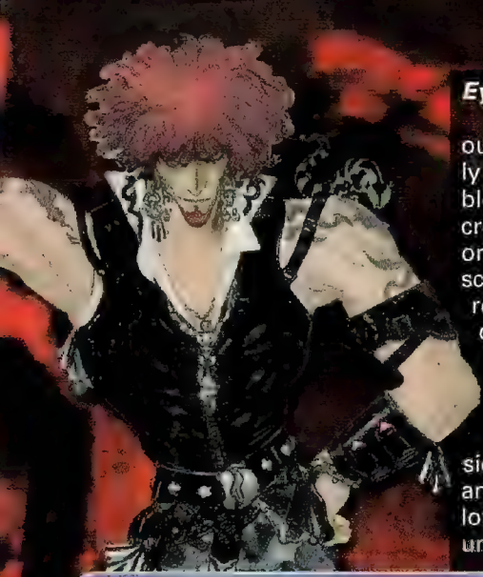
Four Months To Translate?!

When Square EA told me *FFIX* was tentatively scheduled for release late this year, I thought, "Good luck." Remember the days when it would take more than a year for us to get the company's latest RPG in the States? Oh, the long cruel winters... Considering the Japanese version of *IX* came out in July, they're hoping to get the U.S. copy out by Christmas? I didn't put much faith in it (just as I still find it hard to believe that *The Bouncer* will ship this year, seeing as how nobody has even played it yet), but fortunately, I was wrong. Not only was *Final Fantasy IX* translated in record time (3-4 months), but the quality of the translation is exceptional as well—far surpassing any of the company's previous efforts! The one area where much is often 'lost in the translation' is the way characters speak in Japanese. A young girl (no comments from the peanut gallery, please) speaks quite differently from a teenaged boy, who uses different words than an old man. The localization crew has given most of the characters a very unique style of speech or word choices, further developing their personalities above and beyond the usual straightforward translation. Also, considering the numerous story segments recounted via the Active Time Events, there is a lot of text in this game, and the translation is nearly error free. Kudos to the localization team. They did a great job in an astonishingly short amount of time. The story itself is a bit slow to develop, but it's a solid plot with a good deal of mystery and surprise. Thankfully, it's not porous, convoluted, or overbearing like other RPG plots I've seen.

Songs Of Yesteryear

Nobuo Uematsu, the composer for *Final Fantasy I-VIII*, has been in a bit of a slump in the 32-bit era, as his recent work is outshined by his 8 and 16-bit efforts. In fact, the music was one of my minor gripes about *FFVII*. Only a few tracks (the Overworld theme, all the battle/boss music, and Aeris' theme) deserved special notice, while *FFVIII* had even less. Yet if I pop in an older game, songs like Rosa or Celes' theme in *Final Fantasy II* and *III* are still very moving, and Matoya from the original *Final Fantasy* remains rousing and happy, hardly showing any signs of age. *FFIX* has strived to recapture the magic of the older games, and musically, it has succeeded. With the return of a light-hearted atmosphere and fantasy setting, the music has become more upbeat and natural. Mr. Uematsu was also given more time to work on this game, and the end result is his best soundtrack on PlayStation. I haven't been itching to buy a *Final Fantasy* soundtrack like this in over five years, and I highly recommend you check it out. This soundtrack, which is partially arranged, ranks up there with *Final Fantasy Tactics* as a must have.



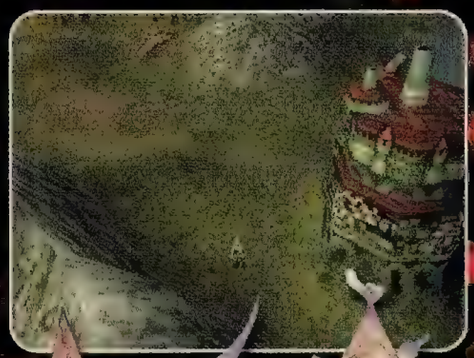


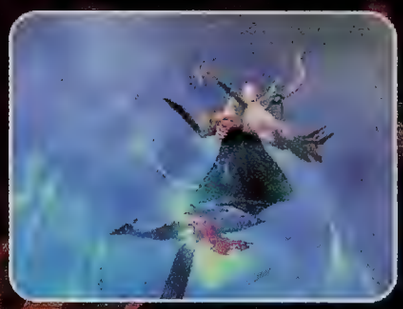
Eye Candy, Anyone?

If there's any one constant with Square's RPGs, it's that the graphics keep getting better with every outing. The pre-rendered backgrounds and CG are breathtaking to say the least. The color palette really gets a full workout, too, as lush forest environments are complemented by powder blue skies... cobblestone streets and Victorian architecture contrast with decrepit town ruins overrun by vines and creepers. The fantasy setting makes the world all the more enchanting, as everything is extremely colorful and presented almost like a child's story book. Square continues to push the envelope with scenes overlaying CG with polygonal characters. The CG, which is absolutely gorgeous, is like a reward given to you for advancing through the game. It's doled out in bite-size chunks and is typically reserved for ultra-dramatic, cinematic moments that are much better visualized than presented via script or in-game graphics.

Gameplay... Good...

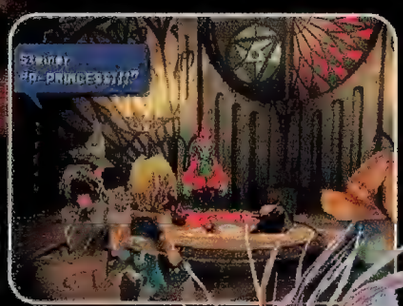
More important than the flashy graphics, this game plays as good as it looks. We're talking classic *Final Fantasy* here. Battles are exactly what you'd expect, with a respectable amount of challenge and even mild strategy required at times. Instead of Materia or Junctioning, *FFIX's* magic system is a lot like the espers of *Final Fantasy III*. Equipping different weapons and armor will teach your character unique spells which (s)he uses later. Simplicity is key. There's still a fair amount of customization as you decide which spells/ability to equip at any given time (you can only use a certain amount), but it is far from tedious. *FFIX* also offers a bunch of mini-games, including the ever-popular card battle game. Being a qualified Magic: The Gathering and Triple Triad loser (the hip quotient at a MtG Pro Tour is a sight to behold), I can definitely say that the new card game in *FFIX* requires very little skill. Much of it comes down to chance and who goes last. The game rewards playing a lot as opposed to skill. Not quite what I wanted, but this is a minor aspect of the game. As a whole, *Final Fantasy IX* plays great.





My Kingdom For A Moogle Charm!!

With all this praise lavished on *FFIX*, you're probably wondering if there's anything wrong with it. Well, as much as I hate to admit it, this game does have one major Achilles' heel: the random encounters. Modeling itself after the old games a bit **too** much, *Final Fantasy IX* has far too much fighting. The old games featured a lot of battles, but they didn't suffer from annoying loading times at the beginning and end of a fight for environments and characters to be buffered into memory. *FFIX* doesn't load any longer than *VII* or *VIII*, but it does have considerably more battles than its 32-bit brethren... battles which, unlike *Chrono Cross* or *Saga Frontier*, cannot be avoided. *FFIX* is especially brutal when it comes to quantity, as I averaged about two battles per screen, with three fights on a single screen not uncommon. The battles themselves aren't particularly difficult if you know your way around a *Final Fantasy*... they're just time-consuming and a bit repetitious. While the sheer number of battles is a nuisance and game-prolonger, it isn't such a turn-off that I would tell people to avoid the game.



Final Words

Final Fantasy IX is the best game I've seen from Square in the past two years. Not since *Final Fantasy Tactics* have we seen a game of this caliber and overall polish that delivers in all categories: story, graphics, music, and most importantly, gameplay. Fans, we have been clamoring for something like this for five years now. Now that the developer has finally decided to appease us, don't let it pass you by. This is far from the final *Final Fantasy*, but it may be the last one like it.

Eggo still winces at the thought of a futuristic Final Fantasy X *and* XI...

ECM's Rant Room

Hidey-ho, *Final Fantasy* fans, tis I, ECM, the most reviled of the *Final Fantasy VIII* haters the world had ever seen. Sure, I laid into it like a drunk into an oh-so-sweet bottle of SoCo, but it had it coming. After all, the game's called *Final FANTASY* not *Final Beverly Hills 90210*. Yep, not only was the angst-ridden story beyond painful; not only was the game insipidly written; not only was the combat system so completely flawed (the draw system and junctioning—great ideas... ahahahahahaha, right) and as for all the *intelligent gamers* that labeled this game the best RPG of all time, well, how do those words sit in light of an RPG that is 10x the game the previous chapter was. Guess that automatically makes *FFIX* the 'best RPG of all time.' Frankly, *FFIX* is a good, solid *FF* game which harkens back to classic *FF* a la chapters *II* and *III* (*IV* and *VI* for those of you that pretend you know Japanese). The story makes sense; it's fun to read; the characters are, <gasp>, endearing; and hey, there's actually something akin to emotional attachment this time around. The fact is, *FFVIII* was an aberation—something the Japanese fans also noticed. In fact, I might go so far as to say this is the 3rd best *FF* of all time...

PlayStation

FINAL FANTASY Lore

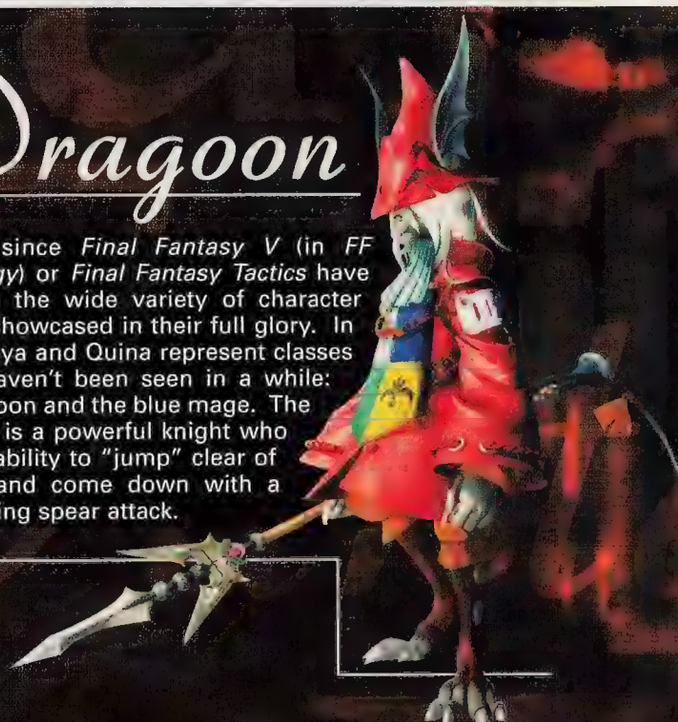
The *Final Fantasy* universe is one of the richest in tradition among all of video games. Each chapter sees the return of familiar faces, while the core group of party members is constantly changing. It's these familiar faces that I'd like to talk about in the next two pages. A **real** *Final Fantasy* game (i.e., one with a fantasy setting) will feature the return of countless characters, monsters, magic spells, classes, and callers which make up the distinguished *FF* tradition. *FFIX* happens to be just such a game, reuniting old friends with new graphics. If you're not up on your *Final Fantasy* lore, or if you're up for a stroll down memory lane, sit back and enjoy this brief tour into the mythos of *Final Fantasy*...

Blue Mage

Other than the expected white and black mages (Garnet and Vivi), *FFIX* revives one other mage class. Quina is the rotund, comic relief character, but (s)he also acts as the party's blue mage, one who learns spells his/her spells from the enemies encountered. In Quina's case, (s)he has a voracious appetite, and digesting certain monsters results in learning their skills. Among the enemy spells available in *Final Fantasy IX*, the coolest looking is Lev 5 Doom. If the target's character level is a multiple of 5, the Grim Reaper materializes in front of them and takes them to the afterlife with a single sweep of his scythe. Other skills to watch for are Goblin Punch (a physical damage-dealing wallop), Roulette (which cycles through all the characters in a battle, until finally claiming a victim for eternal rest), and White Wind. *FF* veterans should drool like Fury at a buffet upon seeing a monster cast White Wind (the most useful, an all-party healing spell).

Dragoon

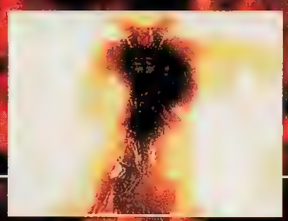
Not since *Final Fantasy V* (in *FF Anthology*) or *Final Fantasy Tactics* have we seen the wide variety of character classes showcased in their full glory. In *FFIX*, Freya and Quina represent classes which haven't been seen in a while: the dragoon and the blue mage. The dragoon is a powerful knight who has the ability to "jump" clear of danger and come down with a devastating spear attack.



Cactrot

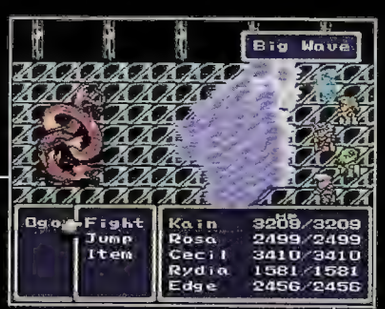
Cactrot (star of our Box O' Fun last month) has been one of the most popular *Final Fantasy* enemies of all time, despite its inability to talk. Running in place, he never really gets anywhere, but he's always very fast (hard to hit with physical attacks), and his 1,000 needles attack can be quite painful if your characters have triple digit hit points. Indigenous to desert regions, this running cactus is a great source of wealth and experience. Other familiar faces you'll see in *FFIX* are the return of Moogles (which play a big role in this game), Cid (king of Lindblum who's been transformed into an oglop, a frog-like creature), tonberry, a red bomb, and the monster in a box. Of course there's also the usual Chocobo shenanigans, although I have yet to spot Biggs and Wedge (Luke's wingmen in the Death Star trench sequence) who have been in the last three games.

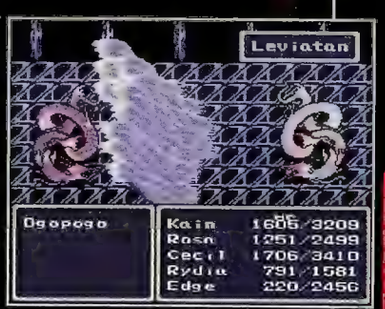
Odin



The Norse god has been a fan favorite for a long time. His imminent arrival is always announced by storm clouds and thunderclaps. Riding his six-legged steed into battle, Odin literally cleaves batches of enemies in two with a single pass. In *FFIX*, he's given the full Square CG treatment, as he's introduced in a cutscene which shows off his secondary attack: a deadly spear, called from the heavens, which annihilates an entire town. Other callers you can look forward to seeing are: Fenrir, Shiva, Ifrit, Ramuh, Alexander, Carbuncle, Leviathan, Phoenix, and Bahamut.

Ogopogo!





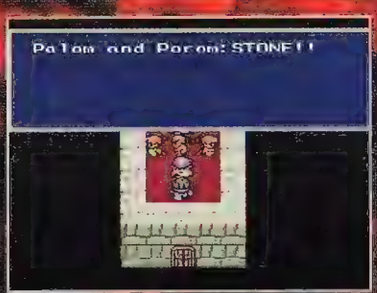
This Leviathan-like boss guarded the legendary sword Masamune in *Final Fantasy II* on SNES (*IV* in Japan), and no, before you get excited, he's not in *Final Fantasy IX*. But he's so cool, I had to mention him in a section on *Final Fantasy* lore, because he's developed a minor cult following. Anyone foolish enough to challenge this mighty boss in *FFII* most likely died a horrible death at the hands of his double Big Wave attack. Only after much leveling up and strategizing could you finally take down this scary serpent, which is based off a real-life, legendary lake monster. Feeling the need to relive my youth, I dusted off my *Final Fantasy II* cart, dug up that huge SNES adapter, turned it on, turned it off, blew on the cart, and fought my way to Ogopogo. He proceeded to beat me into a quivering pile of goo, flatlining three of my five characters, while putting the other two in intensive care with a series of brutal magic assaults. However, after casting Life 2 a couple times and discovering that there was a Cure 4 (!) in this game (you must unlearn what you have learned), I got back on my feet and smoked this turkey in a 10 minute battle for the Ages. He's still worthy of these accolades, however, as Ogopogo will always be one of the toughest fights you'll ever experience in a *Final Fantasy* game.

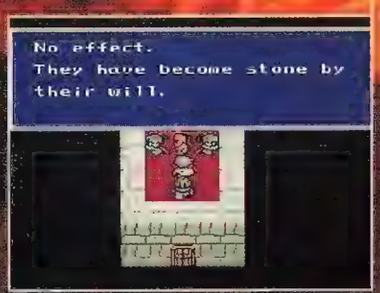
Greatest Moments Of FINAL FANTASY

FINAL FANTASY II SNES

Warning: Spoiler Material!

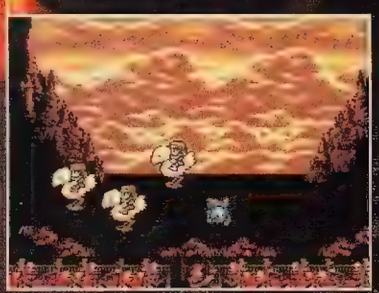
Palom and Porom were the twin magician apprentices who helped you in the early going of *FFII*. Though young and a bit naive, they were full of life and energy... That is, until they were taken abruptly from us in a selfless act that brought tears to the eyes of shocked gamers everywhere. Caught in a 'sinister' crushing wall trap by the evil Golbez, our party finds itself in danger of being flattened in seconds... until the heroic twins decide to do something about it. Before anyone can react, they say their final farewells, look at each other, nod, and cast "stone" upon themselves while on opposing sides of the deathtrap. Now nothing more than human statues, they serve as a painful reminder of the hardship encountered in this grand adventure. This was truly a defining moment in gaming, it had it all: danger, bravery, heroism and sacrifice.

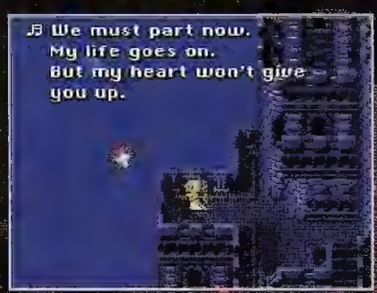




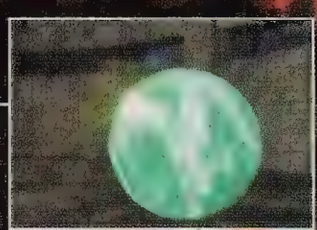
FINAL FANTASY III SNES

The opera scene in *FFIII* changed the way I looked at games. Here, in the middle of my erstwhile normal role-playing adventure, an opera was taking place. Complete with extras, script, protagonist, antagonist, drama, song, dance... This was no mere mini-game or side quest; it was a full-blown production... complete with giant purple octopus dropping onstage. I was so blown away by the spectacle of it all that when the game called upon me to sing the next line in the song, my heart leapt to my throat and I froze (which I'm sure is the response the programmers wanted). Sure enough, I screwed up, the lights dimmed and I was summarily thrown off the stage... forever changed. This single scene raised the *Final Fantasy* series from being a great RPG series to a legendary one.

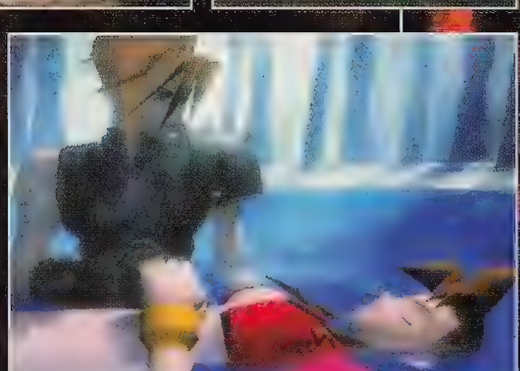


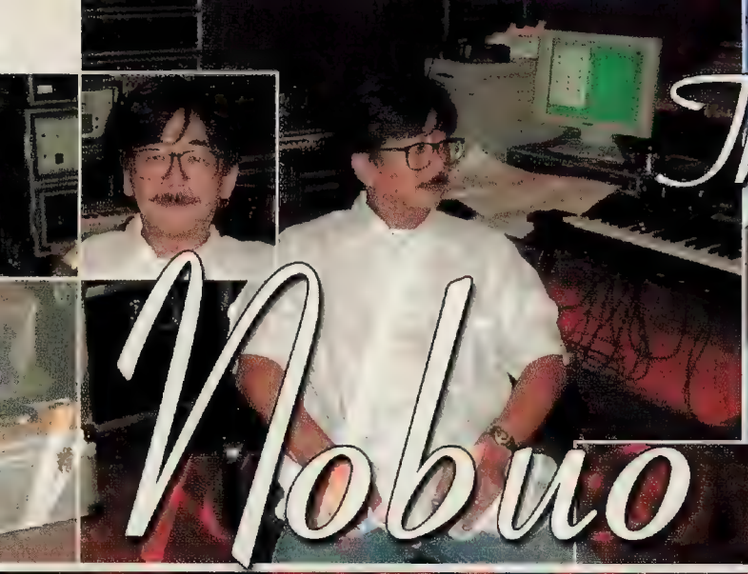


FINAL FANTASY VII PSX



Aeris' death at the end of disc one was the single most moving moment in all of video games. Dramatically illustrated in a stunning CG sequence that will be remembered forever, her murder was completely unexpected and unnecessarily brutal. Your emotions were toyed with even further by Sephiroth's abrupt exit, and the ensuing battle for vengeance, as her theme played in the background... suddenly a eulogy as opposed to a character theme. The follow-up CG of Cloud carrying her to a watery grave was so painful to watch, I tried not to look, even though it was the best CG I'd ever seen. I was totally devastated by this scene, even though I knew it was coming (a friend spoiled it for me before I got there... "Thanks, Yu!"). You see, Aeris meant a lot to my party. She was both the love interest (yes, the one I went on the date with) and the most valuable person in the party (her second level 2 limit break was the best in the game... even better than Omnislash). To lose her so early in the game, and in such dramatic fashion was just heartbreaking. This scene solidified in my mind that CG had a place in games. There are plenty of CG-haters out there who will bash a game (like *Final Fantasy VII* or *VIII*) for being "like a movie;" their argument is that CG doesn't affect gameplay since you're not actually controlling it. However, this scene was much more emotional when illustrated in such vivid detail, as opposed to seeing a tiny sprite keel over and start flashing.





The Music Of FINAL FANTASY Nobuo Uematsu

***GameFan* Interviews Nobuo Uematsu, Composer For Final Fantasy I-IX**

GameFan: I think *FFIX* is your best work on PlayStation. The music sounds more inspired and natural, like the 8 and 16-bit *Final Fantasy* games. Did factors such as extra time to work, the return to a fantasy environment, or character design by Yoshitaka Amano make your job easier when composing the music for this game, compared to say *FFVII* or *VIII*?
Nobuo Uematsu: I don't believe that those particular factors made it any easier, but I tried to relax and set my mind to composing music that reflected my personal taste. It was a fun year, in which I was able to immerse myself in composing music and not be bothered by other things.

GF: Did you work with Emiko Shiratori at all, or did you compose the music for *Melodies of Life*?
NU: I composed the music myself.

GF: There's an abundance of arranged *Final Fantasy* music CDs out there, which feature music you composed, but performed by live orchestras and real instruments. How do you feel about these? Do they inspire you to use real instruments, or do you view it as a tribute to your work?
NU: Music is something that takes a life of its own once it is presented to the public. It may be loved by many or completely ignored, but I have no say in these matters. If the music is loved by many, then I guess that music had luck with fate. I prefer real instruments and live orchestras over computer music.

GF: Games like Capcom's *Onimusha* or THQ's *Evil Dead* have live orchestras doing the in-game music. Do you think we can someday expect to hear an entire in-game soundtrack composed by you and performed by a live orchestra? The end of *FFVII* features an arranged version of the *Final Fantasy* theme, and it sounds awesome!
NU: Live orchestral music is fantastic, but I don't believe that it is the purest form of music and that one must eventually head in this direction; it is just one of many forms of music that exist. If a particular scene requires heavy metal, then I will not hesitate to use it.

GF: Can we expect to see any of your work outside the realms of *Final Fantasy*? Do you have any plans for individual projects that you can talk about?
NU: There is a series called "Ten Plants" that is distributed by Indies. Game music composers are asked to compose music related to a certain theme for each session. The music is then used to create a CD. I am currently working on the third CD. Other projects on which I am working include composing a theme song for an anime movie called "Aa Megami Sama," providing a song for a Taiwanese singer named Elva, composing music for a flute player named Kazunori Seo, and providing a composition for Emiko Shiratori's solo album.

GF: I really enjoyed the remixed battle music in *FFIX*. Can we expect to see any more remixes of older music in a future game or CD soundtrack, perhaps?
NU: I believe remixes will be possible.

GF: How much time are they giving you to finish the music for *Final Fantasy X*? How does this compare to the time you're usually given for a game?
NU: The amount of time is still undecided, but I already have several interesting ideas that will finally be possible in this next game.

GF: Did you compose the song for the CG introduction to *Final Fantasy VIII*? It sounded completely different from the music in the rest of the game. Do you like having a chorus of vocals in your work?
NU: I composed the introduction song. It was the first time I had ever composed a mixed chorus composition, but it is an interesting genre, and I would like to try it again.

GF: Are you working on the *Final Fantasy* movie? If so, what is your role?
NU: No comment.

GF: Is it challenging working on the PlayStation 2?
NU: Regardless of the platform, this job is continuously challenging.

GF: Do you think that the music in the *Final Fantasy* games matches your overall vision? Or have you been unable to accurately replicate the music as you've imagined it?
NU: For a minute, let's replace music with words. When a scholar makes a speech at an academic meeting, some words may be difficult for a novice to comprehend, but at the same time, there will be words that are used in ordinary dialogue. Because I do not know complex musical terms, I can only represent my music through ordinary dialogue. Because of this, I believe many more people can relate to my music. I would like to convey my emotions to the public and have them experience these emotions as well. This is what I would like to accomplish through my music. In this way, it can be said that the music of *FF* is the music of my own emotions.

GameFan thanks Nobuo Uematsu for taking time off to answer these questions and Squaresoft for arranging the interview.

U.S. Soundtrack Available

Electrosource and Tokyopop.com really love you! The soundtrack for Final Fantasy IX (which is the best of the recent Final Fantasies) is coming to the U.S.! Electrosource thinks mainstream America is ready for video game soundtracks which, up until recently, have been the exclusive domain of Japanese importers and hard-core fans only. I will personally vouch for this one; it's excellent—a compilation of the best songs taken straight from the four CD Japanese OST. There's been no mucking with it, no liberties taken, and the selection of songs is the best I've seen in a U.S. release. The FF Anthology soundtrack and The Best of Final Fantasy 1994-1999 were hit and miss on the song choices, but FFIX's is spot on! Great job, guys. If you've never bought a game soundtrack before because it was too "geeky," you might want to give this CD a listen. It's mostly arranged, so it doesn't have that tinny, MIDI quality to it. Of course, hard-core fans will still buy the Japanese soundtrack because it has more music, but this is a single affordable CD (priced the same as regular CD's) that has the best stuff. There's even ONE song (Kogaku Original) that's not on the Japanese soundtrack!

PlayStation

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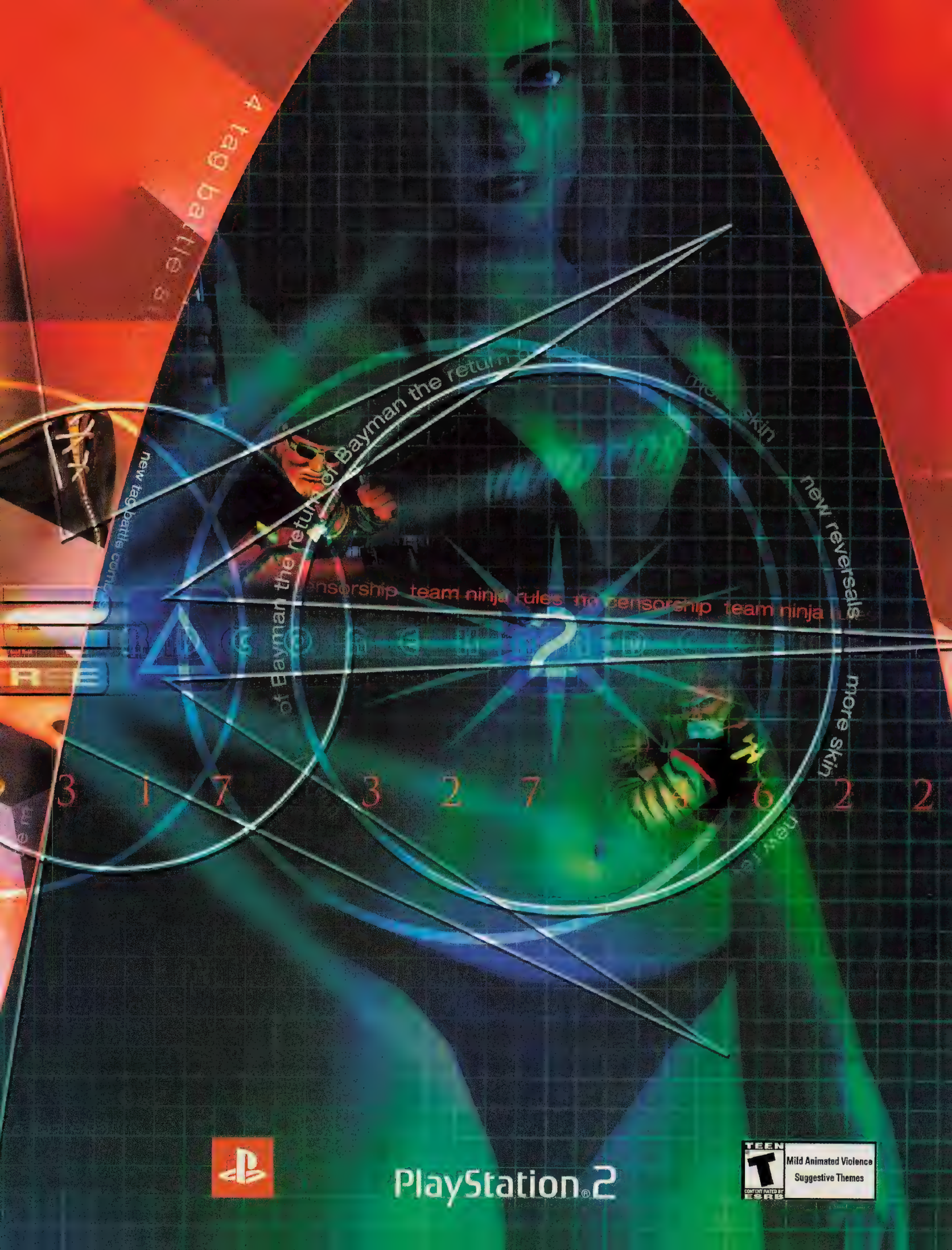
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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

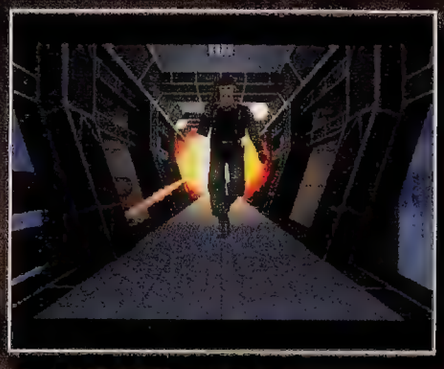
Sometimes we forget that many of you don't play PC games and are not current with the news on PC titles. Even though we are a console magazine, we love all good games, PC and otherwise (ECM does not approve however). Hell, I could have worked an entire other full time job on the hours I lost playing *Everquest*. So we are always looking to see what great PC titles will be making their way to the console, which remains our preferred gaming choice.

This past year, one of the most exciting first-person shooters was released by Activision. You may be familiar with *Soldier of Fortune* because it was recently announced to be coming to the Dreamcast. Well, I'm here to tell you that *SoF* is also coming to the PS2 sometime in the beginning of next year.

The Story

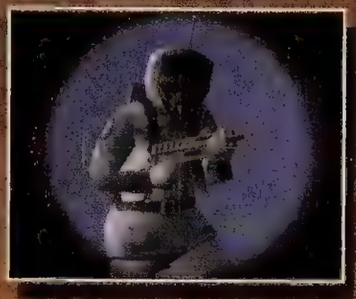
What is cooler than taking on the persona of a merc, kickin' ass and taking names? How about playing the part of a real-life hardass to take part in said butt-kicking? *Soldier of Fortune* is a fictional adventure that is based on the persona of real-life soldier of fortune, John Mullin. Mullin is a hardened war vet who did three tours in Vietnam, first as a Green Beret and then as a reconnaissance man. After he retired from an impressive 21-year military career, John went into private contracting, working in Europe, the Middle East, and South and Central America. Here, he is part of a contract group know as "The Shop," specializing in anti-terrorist jobs. The call comes in; problems have arisen in a New York subway station and you and your team are needed to neutralize the insurgents and find out who is behind the attack. You find yourself deep in a sinister scheme that spans continents.

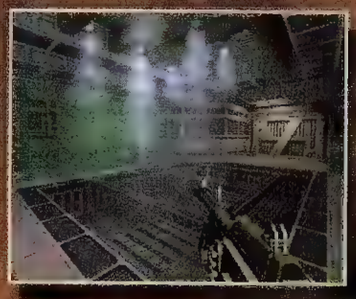
EXCLUSIVE	JUDGE: I EAT GREEN BERETS FOR BREAKFAST...	DEVELOPER - PIPEDREAM PUBLISHER - MAJESCO	# OF PLAYERS TBD AVAILABLE 2ND QTR '01



GHOUL-ish Gameplay

The engine that *SoF* uses is similar to that of *Quake 2* and is called GHOUL. This cutting edge code allows for incredibly well-detailed models, more lifelike character movement and much better collision detection. The area that it garners most of its attention for, from gamers, though, is its location-based damage model. With GHOUL, you have 26 different zones on the player model that you can affect with damage. In other words, when you aim your weapon at a specific location of the body, that part of the body will be damaged. And oh boy, is that damage something to behold. Blowing off legs at the knee, multiple head wound locations, winging enemies or just plain-old disemboweling guys with shotgun blasts; these are just some of the gory animations you will be treated to when you are playing. Mmm, mmm, good.



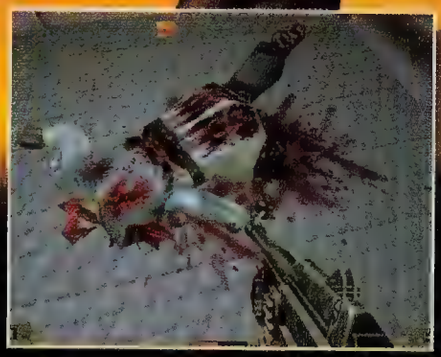


The Innards...

Soldier of Fortune isn't just exploding heads and limbs flying... there is a game in there—a damn good one at that, too. In what is my choice for the second best one player FPS experiences (*Half-Life* still holds the top spot), *SoF* has everything you could possibly want in an adventure: big, well-detailed environments (31 to be exact); dozens of authentic weapons to choose from (and you do this before every mission); fantastic control; and, yes, some of the most deliciously gruesome violence ever seen in a game. Whether you are blowing guys in half on a moving train, causing huge exit wounds with your sniper rifle in the Russian Tundra (ahh, the contrast of deep red blood on the pure white snow) or just executing wounded soldiers as they lay on the ground grasping their bloody nubs, you will be loving every second of it. *SoF* is one of the most immersive games I have ever played.

I would have been skeptical as to whether it was possible to properly transfer a game of this power to the console but after seeing *Unreal Tournament* on the PS2 and *Quake 3* on the Dreamcast, I am confident. Majesco still has a long way to go with *SoF* and there are many things that can go wrong between now and then. They have been doing some good stuff with their Dreamcast development, but as any developer will tell you, the PS2 is a totally different beast that is much harder to tame.

The flood of PC first-person shooters is almost complete. Just about every one of the popular titles have either just been released on PS2 or Dreamcast, or are in the process of being transferred. *Quake 3*, *Half-Life*, *Unreal Tournament* and *SoF*, for the Dreamcast, are all lookin' sweet, but it is *Soldier of Fortune*, on the PS2, that just may end up the most impressive one of them all. Keep a close eye on this game, people. It is raw, savage fun... just the way a good first-person shooter should be. ■



Fortune Telling

GameFan interviews David Elmekies, Director of Game Development, Pipedream

GameFan: The PC game is quite violent. One of the game's selling points was even the technology allowing for multiple wounding spots, or "Gore Zones" on the enemies. Can we expect the same gruesome action on the PS2 or will you be toning it down?
David Elmekies: We intend to keep the game play as it is in the PC version. We would like to give the consumer the same experience and rush of playing *Soldier of Fortune* on PS2. Expect the same gruesome play, if not better.

GF: This will be the third platform that the game will have been released on. Considering the power of the PS2, were you able to improve on any areas that initially did not meet Raven's expectations on the PC?
DM: Right now it is still too early to indicate which areas we will be able to improve on. We can tell you that we will utilize the new technology to the max to enhance *SoF* to the fullest.

GF: Did you run into problems with the PS2 hardware while in development?
DE: We are working on designing a solid infrastructure on how to pursue development for *Soldier of Fortune*. We have not faced any major issues as of yet.

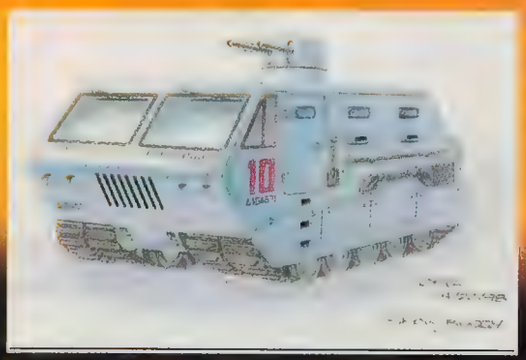
GF: Was there much input from John Mullins?
DE: We have not yet had the pleasure of speaking with him, but would love to be able to. It would be very interesting to hear from the actual character of *SoF*.

[illegible] In this [illegible] we anything we haven't seen [illegible] Dreamcast ver-

sions?
DE: Again, it is still too early in development to commit to any additions or changes to the game. When we are a bit further in development we will have a better grasp of the tools and capabilities of the PS2.

GF: Somewhere down the line there is going to be the option to use the PS2 for online gaming, much like the Dreamcast is. Will this *SoF* be forward-thinking enough to have an option implemented in game, for when that revolution occurs? And if so, will the internet code be better than the PC version, which suffered from crummy online play.
DE: If the tools become available, we will definitely implement online gaming into *SoF*. Obviously our plan is to give the consumer the best game possible. Any additions that we can add to enhance the game will definitely be a consideration.

GF: Having developed for both the Dreamcast and the PS2, do you have any thoughts/comparisons/complains about developing for the two?
DE: Each console has its own benefits and detriments. DreamCast was our first developing experience, so we will always be loyal to it. Overall, both are great consoles.



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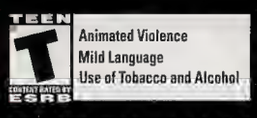

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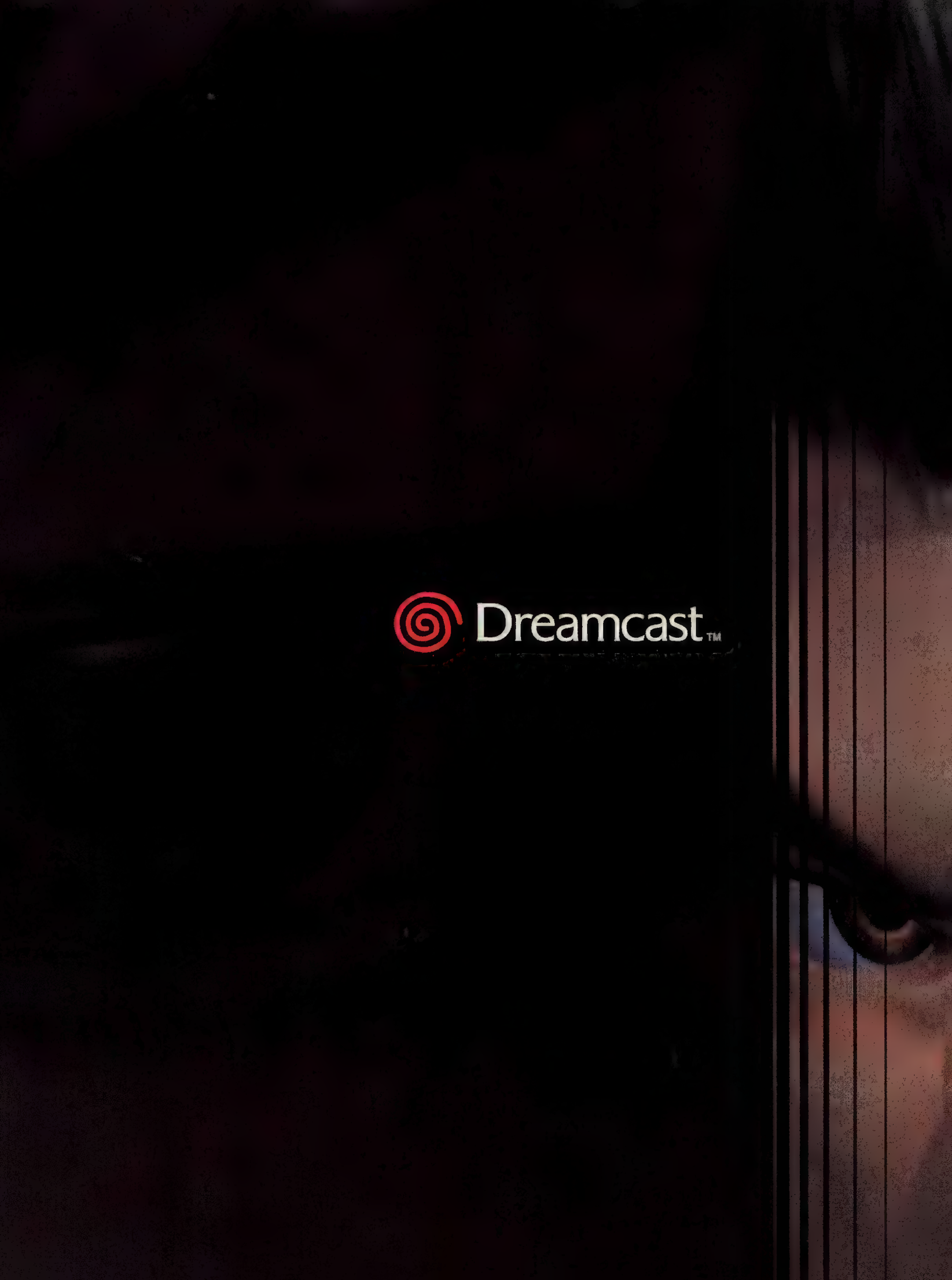

Dreamcast™

FREEFALL

...And so it starts—the newest pseudo-contender in the quest for console dominance strides onto the field, head held high, packing full DVD playback, some original content and a potentially winning, Trojan Horse-style, business plan. PS2? Actually no, its name is Nuon and here's the first game available for it, *Freefall 3050 AD* by TAKS.

If you tuned in last month, I took you through *Freefall*'s paces in a 3 page preview. At that time some key issues were still waiting for remedy: things such as frame rate and animation, mainly, with some overall tweaking yet to be done. Also, I promised I'd tell you as to whether *Freefall* was worth the price of Nuon admission (upwards of three bills). The verdict? Read on...

First off, the animation has been improved *ever so slightly*—however, our hero still suffers from a stiff gait and more than likely won't be swaggering up to the ladies any time soon to show his vast, smoothly animated repertoire of moves. Everything still moves with a decidedly rough edge, and could use a boost in the animation dept.

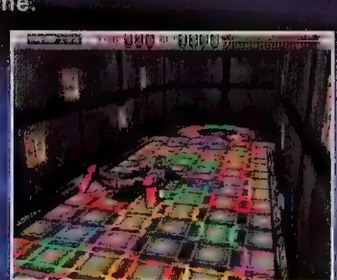
As for the frame rate, it's now more stable and lends itself to a more playable experience, though at times it'll still let down the side—makes it somewhat difficult to control in the tight spots. Still, it's smooth enough and fast enough to garner the all-important adrenaline rush that is key to this game.

As for the gameplay, it's still the same, revolutionary originality which will still require some getting used to via the Nuon's control pad—I stress again that a dual shock pad probably would have eliminated the grievous learning curve, but anything worth playing is worth mastering.

So, in summary: It's not going to blow your socks off visually, but what it will do is show you that the world of gaming isn't limited to the output of the 'mainstream' companies; that there can, and will be, studios willing to push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable fare; that VM Labs is willing to take a chance on something different and off the beaten path. I for one applaud them for having the nerve to take the chance.

However, I will not go so far as to tell you that you should buy a Nuon-equipped DVD player for this game. It is fun, don't get me wrong, but it does have some problems that will more than likely prevent it from garnering wide acceptance (hell, originality alone almost guarantees this). Perhaps with *Tempest 3K* (which we apparently won't see till we buy a copy of our own—thanks, guys), but not this time around. Still, if you're thirsting for something different and **do not** have a DVD player yet, I recommend you go get one—besides, only a sausage plays DVDs on a game console, but the hardcore play games on a DVD player...

*ECM wonders what someone who's hardcore **and** a sausage would play games on.*



REVIEW | ECM: It begins! | Developer - TAKS | Publisher - VM Labs | 1 Player | Available 4th Qtr | Viewpoint Score: 80

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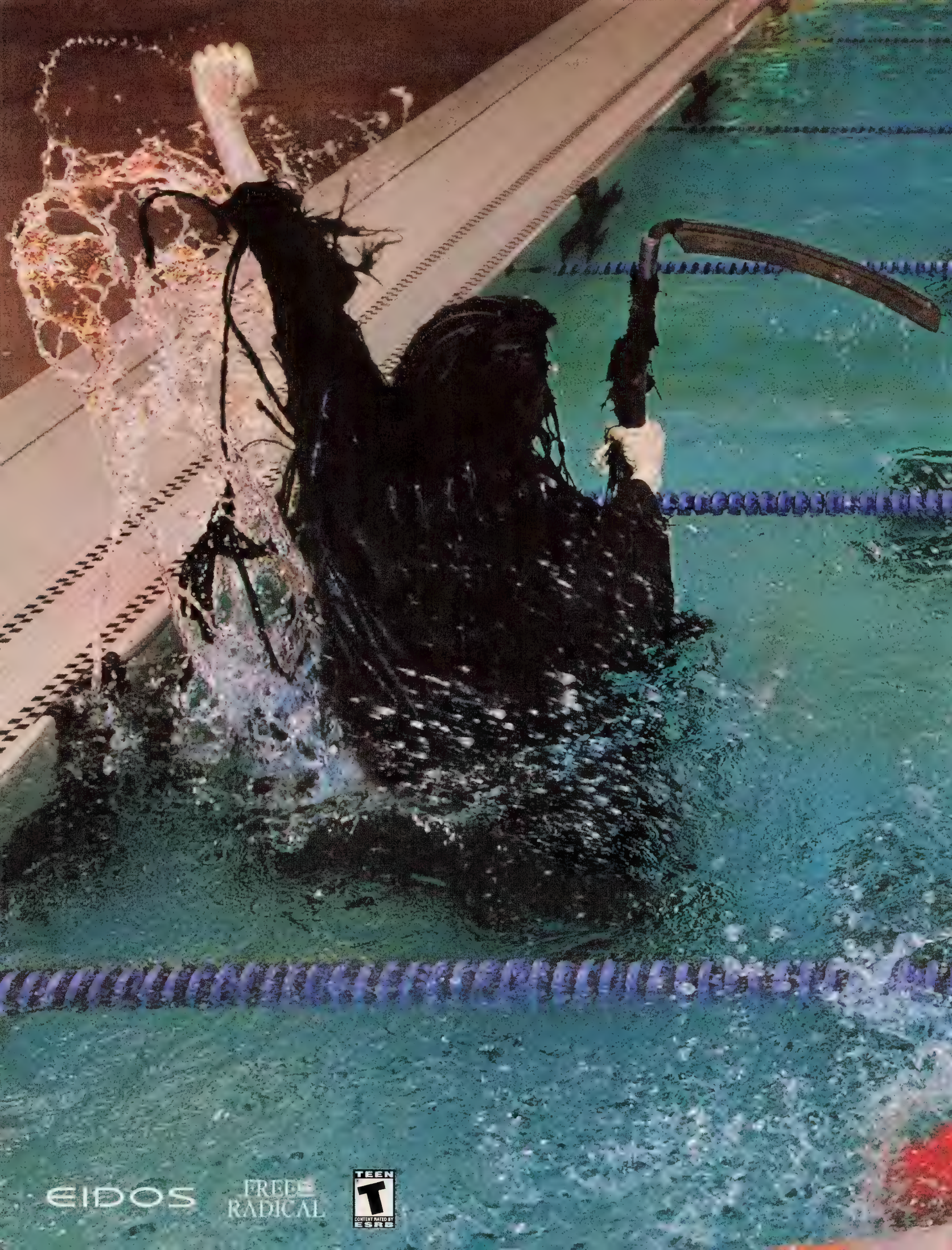
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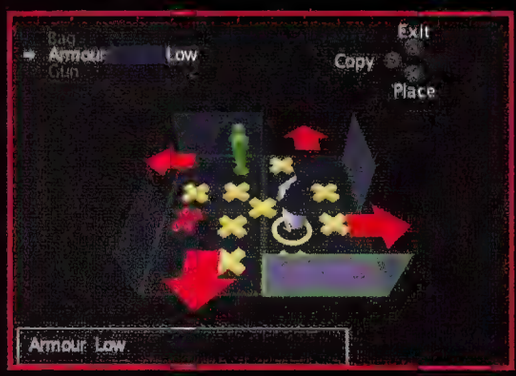

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GF Holiday Wish List

It's that time of the year again. Snow's falling, shops are bustling, and Santa Claus is ringing his Salvation Army bell. While some of you may be freezing your buns off, huddled around a fireplace looking at the blank spot in the entertainment center where your reserved PS2 was supposed to be, it's a chilly 70 degrees in Los Angeles <gasp> "You mean we have to stop wearing shorts for a day?!" and us *GameFan* staffers are happy as can be. While Little Timmy is in an eBay bidding war with Little Jimmy over Sony's under-produced PS2, we're sitting back, downing drinks, and having a blast because... we got ours (PS2)! But since it's in our nature to not be content with what we have, the editorial staff has compiled a Christmas Wishlist of what else we want this holiday season. Feel free to look over our deepest, darkest desires...

ECM

It's that time of year again, people. That time when all the best games come out, the newest and hottest systems are in really short supply (Mmmm, crow tastes good) and I get to give you, the reader, exactly what I want to get for the Christmas season. What's this got to do with video games? Not much, really. But since we had some space to kill at the end of this issue, it seemed like the right thing to do (that, and it's real easy to 'bang' out)... so without further ado, here's my Christmas Wish List:

For Kodomo: A Season Pass to our local Oral Hygiene Engineer (that's the dentist for those of you with less-pressing gum and teeth issues)—make Kodomo's teeth a nice sickly yellow, which would be much improved from their current matte black.

For Eggo: A lot of frequent flyer miles so he can continue to flirt with his chronologically-challenged girlfriend (and the law: "We don't cotton to your types 'round here, boy!") up close and personal.

For Fury: A sit-down with the fine lads at Daily Radar who, despite possessing not one slim iota of gaming skill (witness recent online videos of *THPS2* and *MSR* for all the proof you need of that), can still teach Fury a thing or two about playing games.

For The Judge: A long, long talk about what makes a GameFan employee a GameFan employee, including (but not limited to) the following: on imports ("They're games, not cars"); on being hardcore ("No, not pornography, Judge"); and PC games ("Console gamers are better!!!!").

For Reubus: A 'velocity-inhibitor' (that's a pillow or some such) to rest directly in front of his television, to absorb the impact of thrown controllers, pets (two cats), and unlucky passerby after he gets a little "ticked" at certain games—it's that, or it's off to the vet to get him 'snipped.'

For Tao: A tab at any one of our fine local drinking establishments so that the boy can really learn to drink: "Leaving 80% of it in the toilet doesn't count, stripling."

For Sketch: A set of lead weights to keep his feet from "Floating a few inches off of the ground"—we like our employees, uh, grounded... if you know what I mean, and I think you do.

For Phoenix: A lesson in comic book art. See, anybody that's as skilled an artist as Phoenix should **know** how to draw comic book characters innately. In fact, Phoenix is the last GF employee to be grandfathered in under our new hiring policy (see last month's Productivity Killer for the details).

For Me: A trip to the newly opened Betty Ford wing for chronic eBay addicts and the realization that the competition can't be all that bad, right? Right?!

And last but certainly not least, to the readers: A lifetime sub to GameFan and a hearty thanks to all of you that have made this the best year I've had at the magazine. Thanks to all you guys, girls, and Shidoshi for helping us make the best mag out there and for your constant support, tender criticism and just plain sticking with us through the good, bad and the ugly—you guys rule! Merry Christmas (and happy Chanukah!)! **ECM**

EGGO

I'm pretty much content with my personal belongings at this point. Sure, Christmas morn would be that much merrier if I found stocking stuffers like: an import copy of *Strikers: 1945* for Saturn, an arcade board of *Dragon Blaze*, or a mint set of box and instructions to go with my naked copy of *Final Fantasy II* for SNES. However, there are very few things I crave which can actually be bought at this point.

After sailing the Spanish Main for months on my C64, I'm still dying to see Sid Meier's *Pirates!* updated on a next-generation console... *Pirates X!*, anyone? Playing the *Diablo 2* expansion on PC before its Q1 2001 release would be very cool, as would seeing a whole new group of gamers enter Blizzard's online world courtesy of Port Box. Lastly, when is some developer going to have the huevos to venture a little capital to bring *Guilty Gear X* to the States on Dreamcast? This is probably the best looking 2D game ever, and yet nobody has stepped forward with an announcement of publishing it in the U.S. Don't tell me this will be the second coming of *Tobal 2*, or I'll be very upset, as should any fan of 2D games.

Since I know most of these wishes have a snowball's chance in hell of actually happening (without a multi-million dollar budget), I will instead wish for good things for my fellow man; hopefully, my friends at *GameFan* can get what they really want this Christmas. The only thing better than seeing ECM single-handedly revive the shooter genre is for him not to remind me that he's doing it every five minutes ("...and did I mention I have a 36-inch Vega XBR?" "Why, yes, Eric... You did."). What the Judge really needs for Christmas isn't easy to come by. Those who have it won't readily part with it, and it's becoming a rarer commodity by the day (you can't even find it on eBay any more)... gaming skill. By the way, if any of you do happen to find some skill-in-a-box, could you please send some of it to those guys at that Egotistical Gaming Magazine? I hear they can use it. Hopefully, Kodomo will be able to find the female Promised Land that he's been futilely searching for the past couple years. Oh, he's been to the Promised Land and back... it's just his memory's starting to fade, and his compass is dusty and broken. Hopefully, Fury can navigate the holiday feasts safely and possibly manage to lose some w... eh, can't hope for too much, right? For the readers, I sincerely wish that everyone has the chance to play *NFL2K1* on SegaNet with a lag-free connection at least once, to experience the beauty of online gameplay and the greatest football game ever. **Eggo**

THE JUDGE

It's that time of year again. When the snow is gently falling, good cheer abounds, in-laws have invaded and the consumer marketing machine has gone into overdrive. Christmas, the only time of year when the Judge can call in sick a lot and stay home playing *EverQuest*.

One of our favorite Christmas Season pastimes is making lists. Oh, what better list is there than the list for Santa (or Hannukah Harry, if you are Fury)? Listen up readers, because if I get cranky if I don't receive everything on mine!

Ok, last issue we went on about what games we'd like to see on PS2, so I will spare you the redundant ramblings about how I want a *Pirates!* game, or some other classic. Instead I will ramble about other redundant stuff that already exists. Would somebody find me a damn copy of *Shadowrun* on the SNES!? You'd think the earth had opened and swallowed up all the remaining copies. And don't feed me that eBay line either. I've had enough of that site. Hit the pavement, find a used game store, and scour it for the title.

The next thing I need are DVDs—and lots of them. I have slacked off in the purchase department, so now I am missing such library staples as *Spinal Tap*, *Special Edition*, *Fright Night* and *High Fidelity*. If anyone has any [illegible] *Adams*, I start drilling.

It has come to my attention that *EverQuest* is slowly breaking down the barriers that separate fantasy from reality for me. No matter how hard I try, though, I cannot wrestle free from the death grip this game has on me. What I would really love for Christmas is some sort of patch like the one I have for smoking. If that isn't available, I will settle for another online game, like *Shadowbane* or *Anarchy Online*. Maybe that way I can spread out the barrier breaking a bit more.

You know what'd be cool? A stuffed California Condor. I've heard there are only a few left so I'd like to get one before they are all gone. I mean, these 2 big plants for my living room I think it would great if I made it look like a "arrangement" in the corner. It could be like he was hiding in the foliage or something.

I can understand how hard it might be to actually get ahold of one of those condors (especially considering the lengthy prison stay you'd have to endure if caught), so I thought it would be equally cool to get an original copy of Herman Melville's *Billy Bud* signed by the whole cast of *What's Happening!!*. How 'bout that for a conversation initiator when you have houseguests? **Judge**

Fury

Here's a little history on your buddy Fury: Like most kids in America I grew up in a moderately dysfunctional family. I say moderately, because we tried real hard to convince ourselves and other people that things were relatively peachy on the surface... Hey, we've at least got to get a few points for that. As is generally the case with dysfunctional families (not excluding the Fury compound), holiday events are reduced to sulking marathons the likes of which happy and well adjusted folk will never know. So needless to say, I realized at quite an early age that in order to circumvent that nasty Christmas angst (remember, I am Jewish... not much to celebrate once those menorah candles blow out), I'd spend the eve of Christmas dining on take-out Chinese food and hitting up a double feature showcase at a local hole in the wall movie theater (nothing better to wipe those depressed thoughts away than with a double header of *American Ninja 1* and *2*).

So here I am, 24 years old and I can safely say that I haven't truly celebrated Hanukah for nearly ten years. But this year... oh yes, this year will be very different. I've spent the last three months reconnecting with my parents and through some rather unorthodox measures (hey, nothing says I love you quite as much as threatening to move back into your folks house) I think my Hanukah 2000 celebration might just go off without a single hitch.

Now as long as I'm back in the holiday spirit, it's due time to make my meager wish list yet again. Because as we all know, the holidays are about getting presents and giving... uhh... yeah, it's all about getting presents. So without further ado, here's a list of a few minor items that would surely put a smile on Fury's face. 1) A full sized SNK cabinet complete with *Metal Slug 3* and *Last Blade 2* (hmm, just so happens ECM 's selling one... interesting) 2) the medium sized George Foreman Grill for the all-protein diet I swear I will one day abide by 3) though this one's a bit of a pipe dream, how about a decent version of *Silpheed* for the PS2 <hey Treasure, I still love ya just next time avoid the contract work!> 4) a turbo charger for my Prelude so I can finally smoke the guy in the Camaro with that sticker of Calvin peeing on the Honda logo, and finally, 5) the new Criterion collection *Boogie Nights* DVD so I can at last see Mark Walberg and John C. Reily sing "You Got The Touch" whenever the mood strikes me.

Well, that's about all I could come up with this year and most likely I'll get nothing on my list. But hey, I'm sure I can afford a few of those items with the money I'm going save on rent. Now if only I can get Mom and Dad to give me my key back... **Fury**

Kodomo

No PS2 for me...

Let's see. By the time Christmas arrives, I'll finally have some domestic PS2 games, but (here's a shocker) I'm not buying an American PS2. Why? Well, the sting of paying upwards of twice the retail price of a Japanese PS2 has not been lost on me and, given the fact that I didn't pre-order one way back in July, it's doubtful that I'll will have been able to walk into a store on October 26th and actually buy one. Perhaps every console maker should have such problems. Unfortunately, this means that all the 20th Century Fox DVDs in my collection that I have (and, dumbass that I am, continue to buy) won't be watched at my house anytime soon. Sadly, this also means that my nightly task of practicing *Tekken Tag Tournament* will have to make do with the 'slightly jaggy' Japanese version, and not the amazingly clean U.S. one. Still, I should have Princess Mononoke on DVD by then, so all is not lost.

Now this is a good thing...

So, with that out of the way, the big thing that keeps me going is definitely going to be SegaNet. Don't get me wrong, I'd would much prefer to play *Tekken* or *Ridge Racer* over the Net, but Sega is the one with the immediate goods and Sony's still a ways off. With *NFL 2K1*, *NBA 2K1*, *Quake III* and a host of others to blaze through, the dream of playing someone better than yourself (the only way to truly improve at a game) in the privacy of your home without having to track them down, is now a reality. The console world has now taken the best part of the PC's domain (namely, networked play), without the annoying aspect of upgrading/downloading patches. This is a good time to be a gamer.

Plus a family tradition...

No doubt during winter break, I'll also take some time to sit down with Mom's and play thorough the latest *Legend of Zelda*. 2 years ago we went through *Zelda 64*, and this time it's *Majora's Mask*. Mom still plays the SNES religiously (though her time is now split between *Yoshi's Island* and the Dreamcast's *Seaman*), and is probably looking forward to beating yet another Nintendo classic. While Miyamoto's role is actually limited this time around, I've played just a few hours into *MM* and it definitely retains the charm of the original. This time, the tone is slightly darker, but when you want quality over quantity, Nintendo's the place to go. **Kodomo**

Mess with the best go down like the rest.

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T Animated Violence

UNIVERSAL

TITUS

NINTENDO 64

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Think you're having a bad day? Try waking up from a 3000 year nap to find meddling humans pillaging your crypt. Resurrecting the hit movie, The Mummy brings the horror of death back to life. And as the hero, it's your duty to fight any scarabs, spirits and undead you meet while exploring the uncharted tombs of the pyramid. Sure, you'll be loaded with weapons and special moves. But beware. After sleeping that long, it just might be his morning breath that kills you.

TEEN T ESRB
Animated Violence
Animated Blood
Dreamcast
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As the grumpidy Grinch, your **mission** is clear.

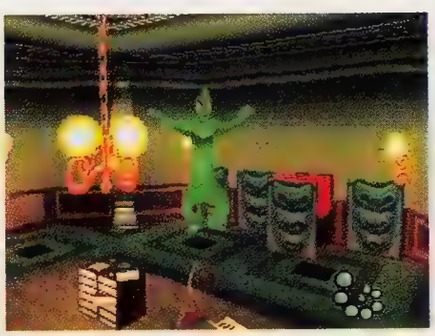
To **Slime**, Stomp and Smash everything far and near.

With Gizmos and **Gadgets**, a heart that's too small

Disrupt all in **Whoville**, from short Whos to tall.

And why should your grinchity ways bring such **pride**?

For that warm, **fuzzy** feeling it gives you inside.



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Comic Mischief

Dreamcast. GAME BOY COLOR PlayStation PC CD ROM

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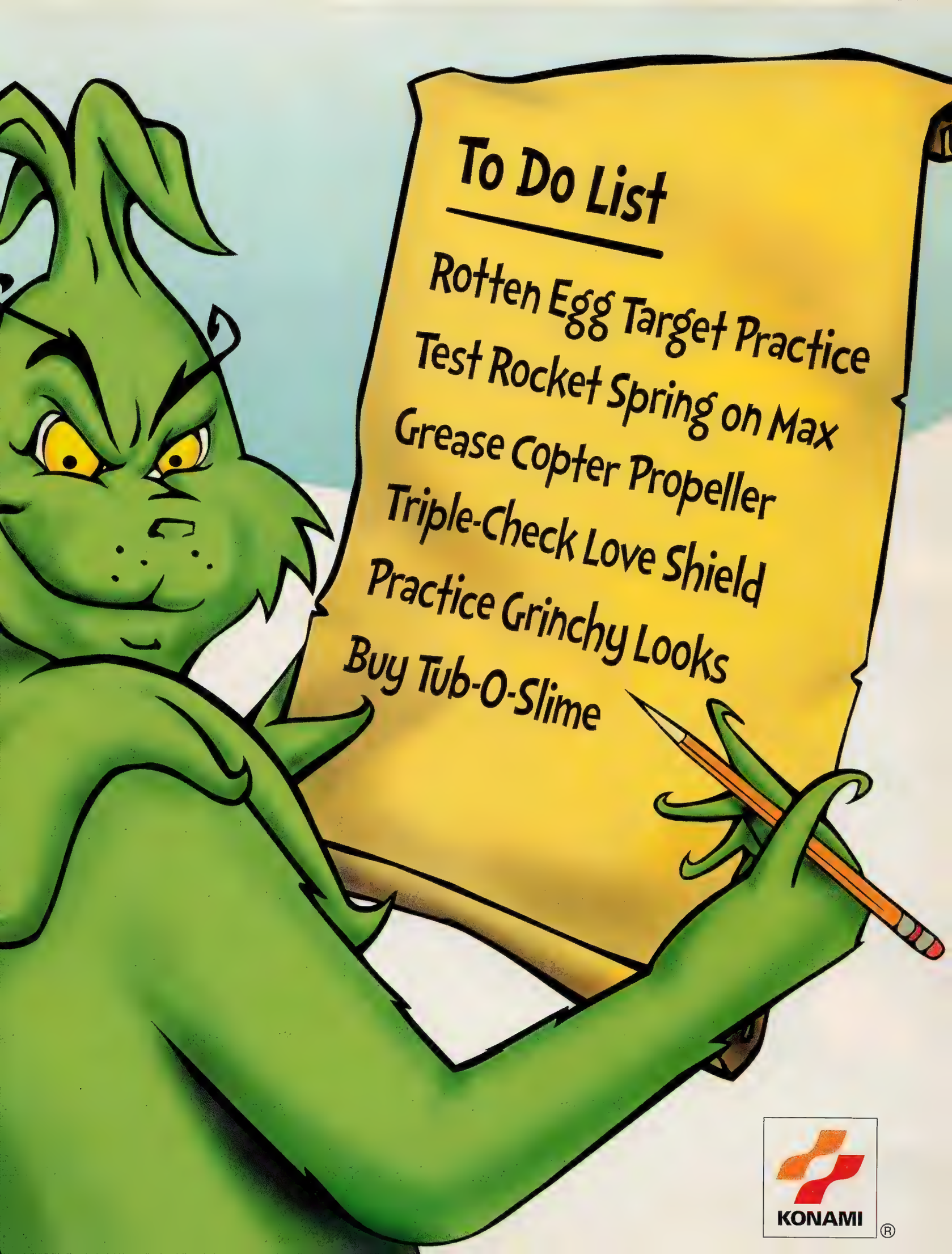
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But I'm just going home to make goulash.
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3 Crazy Characters

Choose From 4 Wacky Vehicles

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Race Through Death Valley

Stonk 'Em with Buzz Buzzard's Hammer

Avoid the Boxing Gloves

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WOODY WOODPECKER RACING

PlayStation

Dreamcast

GAME BOY COLOR

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

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Reviews

Shenmue
Red Dog 70
Looney Tunes Space Race 74
Jet Grind Radio 75
Tony Hawk 2 78

Previews

Stunt GP 79
Skies of Arcadia 80
Xtreme Sports 81
Prince of Persia 3D 82
Max Steel 82
Dinosaur 84
Rainbow 6: Rogue Spear 84

First, A Word (or Three) About Assuming Things...

Assumption #1: I am unabashedly Sega-biased.

Reality: If I'm Sega-biased, I'd hate to see what that makes me towards Nintendo, Treasure and Capcom games—and as we all know, human beings are unfailingly objective in everyday life... just ask the Supreme Court.

Assumption #2: I hate *popular* games because they're popular.

Reality: I don't like games just because I'm "supposed to." If you like a game because your friends or people on a message board say you should, you're not a gamer, you're a drone.

Assumption #3: Opinions are never wrong.

"It may be the most profound video gaming experience you ever have."
—The Official Dreamcast Magazine (on *Shenmue*)

Reality: So much for that.

What do each of these assumptions have to do with Sega's newest would-be über-spectacle *Shenmue*? Well, it's quite simple really: If you heard that I had reviewed *Shenmue* you probably would have made certain assumptions as to what that review might feature. You'd figure that since I'm so "Sega-biased" that no matter how good or bad it truly was, you'd see a nice fat high '90s score from me. The more cynical of you, however, would probably figure that I might (just maybe) underplay it because "ECM doesn't like games that are popular. As for the rest of you, well, you know better than to expect the standard check box review that the competition so likes to bore us all with (Graphics? Check. Gameplay? Check. Music? Check.)... well, get ready for the mother of all "I didn't see this one coming" reviews.

Games Are Supposed to be FUN

Now I don't know about you, but there are very few instances in life I could honestly label as "profound." In point of fact, I don't know if there's a single video game I've ever played that's made such an impact on me—as a whole, sure, but individually?

Oh sure, some of the more unhinged out there would label *Xenogears*, with its psuedo-religious underpinnings, a life-altering experience, but more than likely, they have too much time on their hands—I also have too much of that, but I'd rather spend it engaged in pseudo-meaningful pursuits such as marinating a facsimile of a social life.

Not that I don't think it would be nice if a game made such an impact, but even if it did, I can assure you that *Shenmue* is as far away from that sort of situation as possible—unless desperately trying to stay conscious throughout the game is in any way 'profound.'

But before I head into "are you crazy" territory, let me get the pleasant bits and pieces out of the way first.

The New Aesthetic

Now anybody that tries to tell you for even a nanosecond that *Shenmue*'s graphics aren't stunning is a world class idiot (or so hopelessly PS2-biased that they think 'jaggies' are good). The magnitude of the visuals are such that it wouldn't be very surprising to find out that Sega employed a small 3rd-world-country's-worth of artists to adequately coat every single surface in *Shenmue* with burning-hot texture art—Sega probably now holds the world record for sheer number of Photoshop licenses within a 1 square mile area.

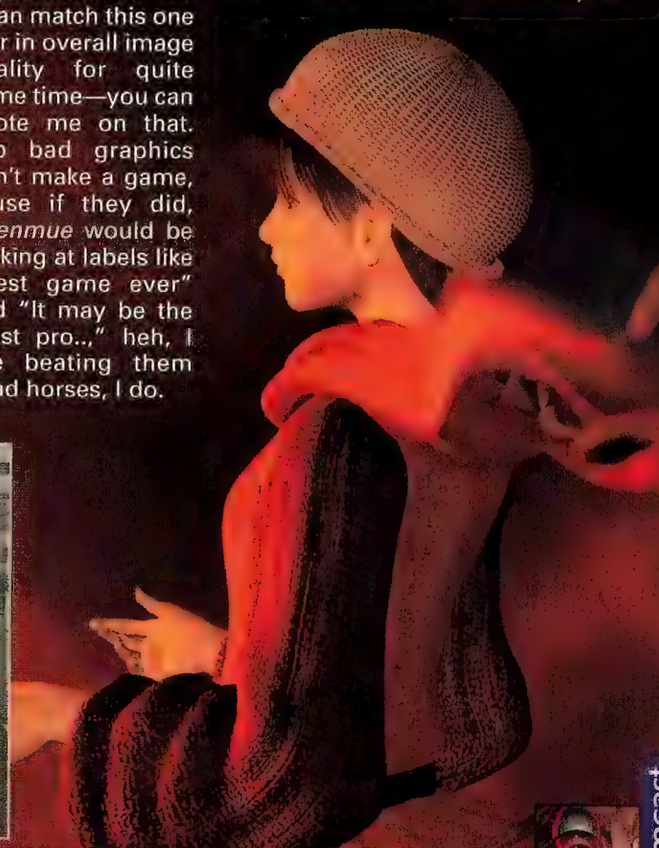
Everything from the lowliest post to the grandest, largest oil tanker in the game is exquisitely textured and the DC's VRAM is constantly filled to the brim with the hard work of a small army of artists dedicated to this project.

In fact, walking around *Shenmue*'s staggeringly huge environs, with nary a repeating texture to be seen, kinda makes the old idea of 'tiled' backgrounds a quaint little intellectual concept—"Did we ever actually play games that used the same textures over and over...?" Yes, without question *Shenmue* is a work of art, but even so, it's a work of art with some flaws.

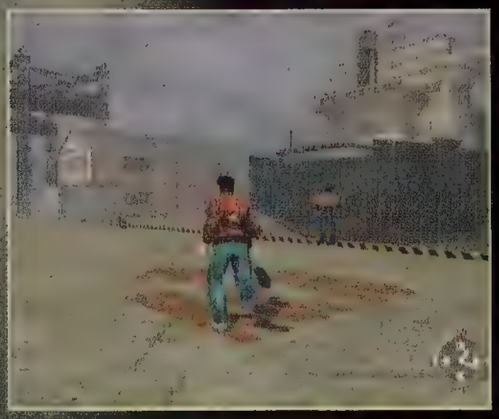
First off, the sheer number of polys being chucked around the screen, coupled to the grievous amount of artwork does take a toll on the frame rate every now and again. While, for the most part, it cruises at a respectable 30 or so fps (Sega needs to start **really** shooting for 60 in light of the fill rate monster that is the PS2, however), but at times, it nose dives when there's simply too much geometry, AI, and artwork displayed all at once. This would annoy less if the game wasn't so geared towards giving you 'reality.'

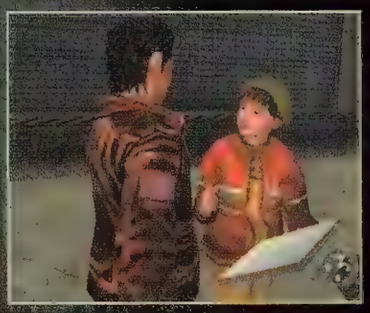
The other visual flaw (I'll ignore the 'popping in' of characters... I'm not that anal) is the lack of anti-aliasing throughout the game. Yep, much has been made of the Power VR2's wonderful ability to render full displays jaggy-less, but in this case it can be quite distracting. If you take a second and really look at the display, you'll notice some heavy duty, "Hey, I didn't know my DC could emulate a PS2" type aliasing. I'd harp on it less, but to be fair, if people are going to nag the PS2 for it, it only seems fair (and the second DC fan boys stop harping to death on aliasing, I won't mention it in DC games, OK?).

However, taken as a whole, without rending it down to its component parts, *Shenmue* is a new landmark in graphics sophistication. You will **not** see a PS2 game that can match this one in sheer amount of artwork nor in overall image quality for quite some time—you can quote me on that. Too bad graphics don't make a game, cause if they did, *Shenmue* would be looking at labels like "Best game ever" and "It may be the most pro..," heh, I like beating them dead horses, I do.



Viewpoint Score: 70	Developer - AM2 of CRI	1 Player	ECM: *Shenmue* is Japanese for boring...
	Publisher - Sega	Available Now	





Speaking In Tongues

A lot has been made about the eternal 'debate' (i.e. shouting match) over the merits of 'subbing' or dubbing translations of everything from Japanese anime to video games, and in the case of *Shenmue*, it was more acute than any other game to date. Otaku everywhere were convinced dubbing the game might ruin just the atmosphere that Yu Suzuki was so desperately striving to complete. I prefer to think that the great majority really isn't interested in playing a game that is fully sub-titled with Japanese voice-overs though (witness the old school popularity of Kung Fu Saturday). So what Sega did was kinda appeal to both corners by providing a full dub and full sub-titles for the otaku out there—there is **no** Japanese-language track, however.

The quality of the dub, though, is mostly good. While some characters come off as annoying (not really in the main characters, but in some of the minor roles), Ryo and company are well-cast in their roles. Speech is natural, and the actual quality of the acting doesn't reek of rush job. However, it isn't as good, overall, as the dub in *Metal Gear Solid* (probably my favorite part of that game).

Time Flies...

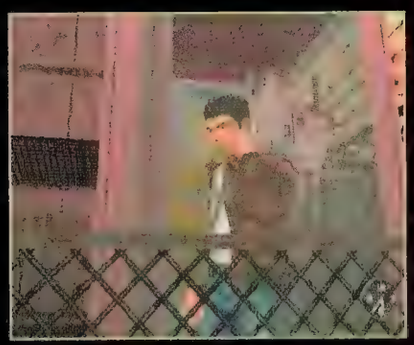
...when you're having fun—or so the saying goes. However, in the case of *Shenmue*, it should probably read: "Time flies, **if** you're having fun." And is more often the case than not, *Shenmue* isn't that much **fun** to play.

Now, before you slam the magazine closed in disgust and start uttering curses vile enough to make even a seasoned sailor wince, let's get down to brass tacks, shall we?

The simple fact is that *Shenmue* is a slow game. Slow to start, slow going as you maneuver through it, and only slightly faster as the game progresses towards the conclusion of chapter one.

When Yu Suzuki essentially decided to create a 'pocket' reality, I think he forgot that a lot of things about life are indeed boring. For instance, waiting 'hours' (in *Shenmue*'s pseudo-real time world) actually feels like hours—and believe me, in a video game that's as big a no-no as they come.

Say, for instance, you find out the night before that you're to meet someone at the motor cycle shop at, say, 3 PM the next day. OK, no problem with that right? Just go home, go to sleep and head over there in the afternoon. Unfortunately, you wake up at nine AM and need to kill about 6 hours before your meeting. The only way to do that, is to coninue around town, talking to people, playing *another* game of *Hang On* or *Space Harrier*, or simply wait for the clock to swing around to 3 PM. Unfortunately, all of these things conspire to drag down the experience, the sense of a living, breathing reality that Yu Suzuki and co. so desperately tried to craft.



The problem is, is that the above is only a drop in the bucket as far as pacing issues go. By way of another example: To spice things up, I figured (and perhaps this was my mistake) that the game would be liberally sprinkled with QTE's and real-time fighting... big mistake. While things do pick up in the later discs it, again, starts out very slowly. And while I was willing to persevere and see things through, I'm willing to bet that 75% of the gamers out there that buy this game **will not** be interested enough; snared, even, to continue through to the second disc. Which is unfortunate, because the game picks up massively at that point... but even then there are issues.

Déjà vu

OK, so the pacing is a little wonky... those of you who still possess a modicum of patience are probably thinking "Cry babies... They don't understand this game." And that may well be true... maybe I don't 'get' it. But this should abruptly illustrate that the problems in *Shenmue* are more than just pacing related.

See, if there's a glaring flaw in *Shenmue*, it's the fact that people don't seem to recall Ryo (our protagonist) from earlier encounters—in fact, sometimes Ryo will repeat the same exact sequence more than once, with the other party blissfully unaware that you've ever conversed (and apparently to Ryo as well... too bad *you* won't forget so easily).

There are sequences in this game that I've played through twice (identical sequences, mind you) that neither party recalls happening. There are sequences in which you should seemingly be able to confront someone outside of the context of a cinema sequence, but you a. don't know who they are (when you as a player clearly do) or b. it simply isn't "7 PM on Tuesday." Now how do you explain a complete and total lack of continuity on this scale? This completely shatters (with a wrecking ball) any suspension of disbelief that it has managed to garner thus far—and without continuity, what good is an RPG/adventure/FREE title? You tell me...

In A Single Word: Disappointed

Though *Ecco* let me down a bit with it's meandering goals and dodgy control, without a doubt *Shenmue* is more of a letdown: and on many levels. It's a letdown as a game; it's a letdown as an experience; and most importantly, it's going to be a huge letdown to most gamers; casual or otherwise. I just hope that Sega isn't really ramping up to push this game super-hard this holiday season, and certainly not at the expense of games like *Jet Grind Radio*, *NFL* and *NBA 2K1* (SegaNet et al, really), etc. That would be a most grievous miscalculation on their part.

It wouldn't be so bad if this game wasn't being positioned as one of Sega's big holiday titles (the biggest, actually), but this game is going to do far more harm to Sega than good. I don't ordinarily do predictions, but outside of the ultra hardcore Sega fanbase (and not even them, if they really pay attention to what I'm saying—I'm talking to you DCTPer's...) don't expect this game to make much noise at all. I hate to say it (I really do) but *Shenmue* is lacking in nearly every area... I'm going back to playing *Zelda*.

ECM's probably going to be the most contented senior citizen ever, 'cause he's getting the bitter old man stuff out of the way now.

Dreamcast

RED DOG

SUPERIOR FIREPOWER

Dull Wet Thud?

When our Euro correspondent, Riot, turned in his *Red Dog* review a ways back, I thought that was it for *Red Dog*'s second party 'tank game.' After all, the game was universally panned in the UK, and even Sega of Europe failed to really market the game adequately—I presumed (at the time) that this was due to their lack of faith in the product as a whole. Turns out, SoE isn't exactly laying the bucks down on many of the titles they've published... I guess if you're too busy sponsoring soccer teams, you don't have that extra cash to actual support things that will directly make you money—but I lack an MBA, so what do I know?

Fast forward about 4-5 months and I'm now holding the shiny gold disc of Crave's *Red Dog* in my hands. I was a bit apprehensive at first, due to the above circumstances, so I set it aside for a week or so, and then when boredom reared its ugly head, I popped *RD* in to give it a whirl—not an initially rousing endorsement, eh? But never let it be said that boredom can't be a great motivator, as I'm now so completely engrossed in this poorly labeled 'tank game' that I'm starting to question the sanity of Riot, SoE and European gamers in general (though the latter really isn't much of a surprise given their predilection for Rally and *Wipeout* games)—this game smokes!

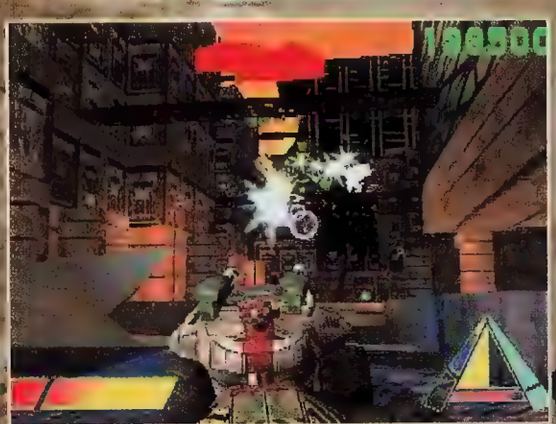
Yep, I'm not generally much of an Argonaut fan (*RD*'s developer), typically lumping them in with other Euro 'demo-coder' outfits like Rage and Criterion (of *Trickstyle*, uh, fame). Yeah, yeah, so they coded *Star Fox* back in the day, and while that was an admittedly great game, it had the magic touch of Nintendo working behind the scenes, so I was never exactly certain who was really the force that made it the title it was. Then, after playing a bevy of very poor FX chip games, *Croc* after *Croc*, and some other less-than-remarkable games, I was all ready to completely and instantly give up on *Red Dog*... which is, I'm sure, what many Euro critics did. However, playing this game for even 15 minutes was enough to get my arcade-gamer blood pumping in all the right directions and to all the right extremities (no, not **that** extremity). But enough of that—to the game itself, faithful readers!

Down And Dirty In the Bog

One thing is for sure: *Red Dog* is a good looking game. While it doesn't run at 60 fps, it does cruise at a respectable pace... which will hardly matter when you get a load of the massive environments and highly detailed enemy characters—not to mention some pretty intense weapon effects.

Many of the energy weapons possess a *Rayman 2*-esque luminosity, lending a massive visual assault on energy weapons—looks less like a straight line and more like an 'actual' laser blast.

Everything is well-animated and the game just screams visual force. The engine is apparently capable of upwards of 3 million polys per second with effects on (though, as Argonaut's chief mentions below, that's sans AI and such). Apparently they also have an engine capable of 6 million polys a second, <gasp>. Too bad they aren't currently doing any games to utilize it...<grrah>.



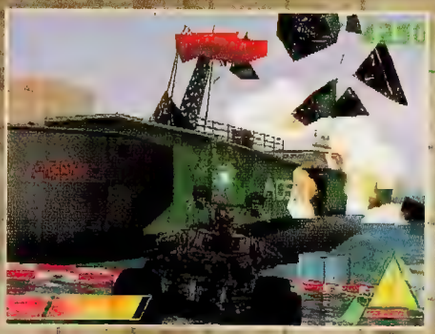
REVIEW				
ECM: Tank game? Not quite.	Developer - Argonaut	1 Player	Viewpoint Score: 89
	Publisher - Crave	Available Now	

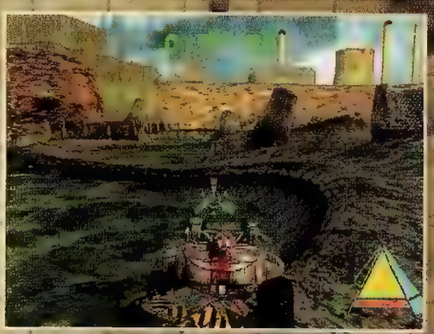
How Much Is A New Tranny Gonna Run Me?

If there's a flaw with *Red Dog*, it's in the rack and pinion steering, four wheel independent disk brakes, and the automatic transmission... unfortunately, *RD* doesn't feature *Turok* control. In other words, you steer and aim with the analog pad. Even worse? It has a really bad case of look-screen-itis. Doesn't sound like a problem? Well, try 'running and gunning' and you'll get a pretty good idea why I (and more than likely, you) had some 'getting to know you' issues.

Ideally, you want to run-and-gun through each level like it's the next coming of *Doom* or some other high speed action game—and while that is possible in *Red Dog*, unfortunately the control scheme makes it more of a clear-a-room-one-at-a-time affair. Since you can't fire independently of the steering mechanism (*a la* a tank, for instance), it makes drawing a bead on a foe not within your immediate field of view can lead to some initial problems, till you come to grips with it.

For instance, say you're bearing down on an unwitting tank, guns blazing, when another pops in from the side and starts pelting you with blast after unrelenting blast (it happens, trust me)—ideally you'd be able to rotate your turret towards the newest interloper and exterminate with extreme prejudice all the while continuing your mad dash at the initial object of your 'affection.' Unfortunately, things don't really work out that way, and it really changes how you approach the game, making it less of a run-and-gun, and more a seek-and-destroy contest. Not a bad thing, just not what I initially expected (I had figured there would have been a way to reconfigure this in the options... to no avail).





Almost There...

Is *Red Dog* in the Triple A DC class of titles? Well, not quite. If they'd allowed some controller tweaking it may very well have. However, what's here is more than sufficient to provide any arcade gamer with a weeks-worth of gaming goodness. Oh, and be warned that *RD* is **not** an easy game, so don't go in expecting to blow through it in a day—especially when you factor in some neat o bonus games and unlockable cheats.

So there ya have it: a genuine video game in a business that's getting further and further removed from such as the months progress. Ignore all the previous reviews and previews of this one and run down to your retailer to experience a very solid, very playable game. And hey, show your support of one of the few 3rd parties that has plans beyond the end of this year for Dreamcast... 'cause lord knows there aren't many left.

The two-week delay was actually because someone thoughtlessly put Red Dog *on ECM's desk, where it was promptly buried beneath heaps of Turbo Grafx and Genesis games.*

11th Hour Interview with Argonaut's Jez San

(The Kill Cheese in those parts)

GameFan: Was *Red Dog* designed exclusively for Dreamcast or had it been 'banging around' Argonaut for some time?

Jez San: Yes, it was designed from the ground up for Dreamcast. It had absolutely not been banging around! Argonaut was one of the first five developers for DC outside of Japan (Argonaut, Bizarre Creations, Red Lemon, No Cliché, and Appaloosa). Sega called us their 1.5-party developers, in reference to the fact that we were treated like in-house developers and given access to the early devkits... warts 'n all!

It all started when Sega asked us to propose a next-generation title, and we asked our artists to go to town on what they thought a next-gen game might look like. They mocked up a video of their imagined game with no limits on the number of polygons and cpu power used, and we then set about trying to faithfully reproduce that vision in reality. It was damn hard, but we got there! In fact, I reckon the final *Red Dog* game is even better looking than the mockup video we put together from a 3D studio movie!

GF: How did you like working with the DC hardware?

JS: It was a joy to use, after the initial learning curve. Development went quite smoothly after the devkits arrived. But prior to that, there was lots of invalid speculation as to what the machine could and couldn't do. The answer is, always, to 'suck it and see!'

GF: Can the DC, long term, compete with the PS2, Xbox, and Game Cube or have developers squeezed most of the juice out of its seemingly simple architecture?

JS: The DC competes in many ways. For instance, the video output quality of the DC is rock solid, well filtered, non-flickery, and looks gorgeous—whereas there are other next-gen game consoles that have more crude display hardware that requires clever software techniques to filter and anti-alias the images, to make them look as good as the DC does for free. Some of what the DC lacks in competitive performance with those other consoles is made up with its additional visual quality.

There is also the high standard of DC game software that shows off very well the system's capabilities and original game developments.

However... in the long run, the other systems have a performance edge, and let's face it, the other console owners have significantly more resources at their disposal (ie: CA$H) with which to market their consoles... and when their generations of games have overcome the minor limitations and learning curves of their respective systems, you can expect the inevitable competition from the other games on the other systems. DC will not be competitive forever. But it's had a good year or so in the next-gen leadership position, and it might last a little bit longer...

GF: By the same token, you mentioned briefly that you had "experimental" DC engines pushing upwards of 6 mpps—was this number practically applicable in real games (i.e. with playable frame rates, lighting effects, high poly counts, etc.)?

JS: The *Red Dog* engine is capable of over 3 million textured/lit/shaded polygons per second although with the physics, shadows and other special effects running it has to share cpu resources with those other things. The most interesting fact is that, our game engine sits on top of Sega's system software (the way every game operates)... and we discovered this is the major limitation to achieving additional performance. With an experimental engine we were able to achieve 6 million polygons per second, and this was achieved by programming 100% in assembler in a way that maximized the dual-issue processor (ie: executing 2 instructions every clock cycle). And most notably, we reverse engineered how to talk to the graphics chip so that we were able to bypass the slow system software and operate the 3D chip at its maximum rate... which is approx 6 million polygons per second. If we ever do another DreamCast game, we can use this amazing technology!

GF: You recently mentioned that Argonaut would not be developing any more DC software—in light of a shaky-looking US launch from Sony and the fact that Xbox is the 'x factor' do you see any possibility of returning to DC at any point in the future?

JS: No publisher wants any DC software that comes out after Christmas. Every publisher I know is canceling its DC lineup... and since developers like us, only work for publishers... we end up developing on the formats that they pay us to develop on. It's simple economics... we can't take a risk of developing any more DC games unless someone wants to buy them from us.

GF: If *Red Dog* does well enough in the States, would you consider a sequel?

JS: We'd love to do a sequel...! But you have to consider the idea that it may not be on DC!

GF: Any chance of seeing *Red Dog* (or a similar game) on other platforms?

JS: There's a slim chance. But we want to see how Americans like our game before we commit to develop any further versions or sequels... watch this space!

GF: What's next for Argonaut (besides heavy Xbox support)?

JS: We have three PS1 games coming out over the coming few months, including *Alien Resurrection* for Fox, and for Disney we have both *Aladdin* and *The Emperor's New Groove* (based on their new X-mas movie!)

We have a major game more than halfway complete on PS2, and a few new games started on Xbox (the latter have been named by Microsoft and featured very heavily in their recent PR footage... ie: *Malice*, *Orchid* & *Kleamers*).

GF: Are you surprised at the DC's success in America as opposed to Europe and Japan? And as a result, do you think *Red Dog* will get more of a fair shake here?

JS: We're optimistic that *Red Dog* will be warmly received in America and achieve the success we think it deserves. Fingers crossed... Hope you enjoy it!

GameFan would like to thank Jez for his quick-but reply to our very late questions (literally on deadline)—good luck with your future projects!

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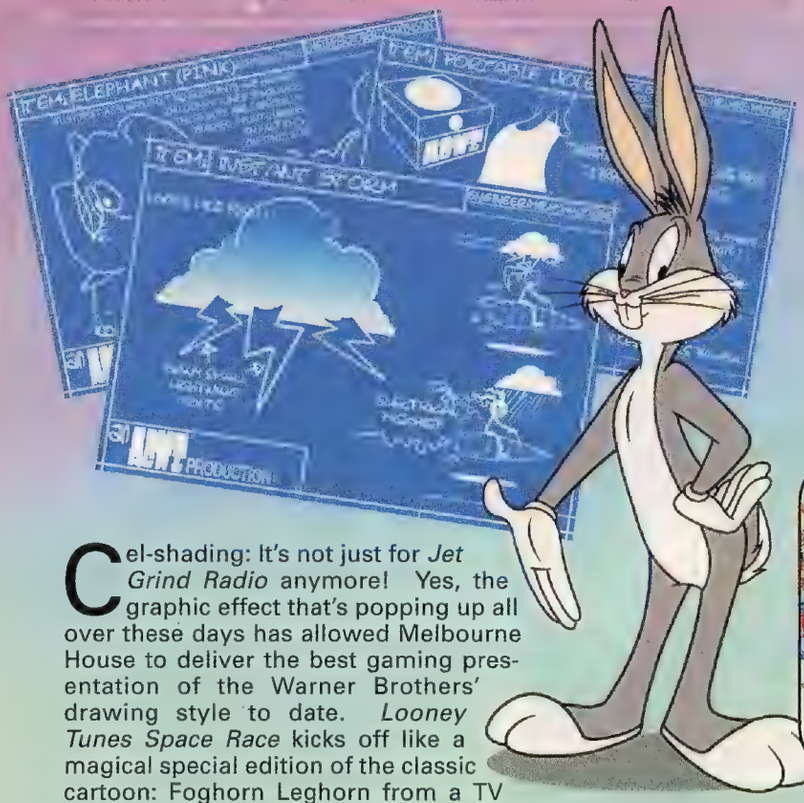
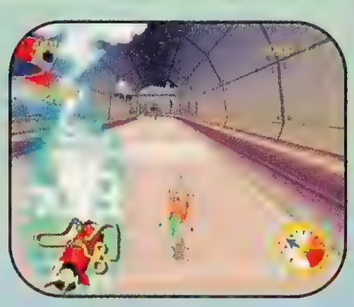
LOONEY TUNES SPACE RACE

In Techno-Color





Cel-shading: It's not just for *Jet Grind Radio* anymore! Yes, the graphic effect that's popping up all over these days has allowed Melbourne House to deliver the best gaming presentation of the Warner Brothers' drawing style to date. *Looney Tunes Space Race* kicks off like a magical special edition of the classic cartoon: Foghorn Leghorn from a TV studio announces that all of our old faves are out to prove their mettle on the track with insane rockets strapped between their legs.

While I don't believe rocket racing ever took place in the cartoon, the concept is sold through a complete representation of the characters and environments of the Looney Tunes world. The gang has brought their catch phrases and their signature animations to the tracks, tracks that are believable creations of what rocket-racing circuits would be like in the world WB originally drew up.

Of course, good looks and a solid script make for a great cartoon episode, but you need gameplay to deliver a game—this a rather obvious observation that previous Looney Tunes-based game developers have thoroughly ignored. Not Melbourne House though—they've concocted a game that's more or less a Looney Tunes-ized *Wipeout*. Each character is akin to a different craft with unique properties (handling, top speed, acceleration, etc.), and the 12 tracks contain tight turns, long jumps, speed boosts, and power-ups to navigate. Spot-on control and an intuitive button layout allow for an immediate racing experience that focuses on finishing in top place, not learning how to drive.

Alas all is not rosy in *Space Race*—flashback with me to the early '90s...

As a young boy I had a friend who would always hang around, no matter what. It was cool at first: we'd play backyard football all day, and then hit up *Tecmo Superbowl* all night. Thing was, he stuck around for the day after and the day affter that—it seemed that we'd never be apart. This little story amply illustrates *Space Race*'s biggest problem: Your opponents always stick around no matter how much space you gain. Ugly rubber band AI at its worst, one can be knocked down from first to last place in a matter of seconds after being hit with a projectile attack; and the opposite is also true, in that a well-timed turbo boost can take you from dead last to first in an instant! No lead is ever too big, no gap insurmountable; it's a sad reality that renders the first two laps of a race moot, making just the last third of race count for anything.

Space Race's AI keeps the title from greatness, but with so much else to enjoy on the GD-ROM the game can't be written off. In fact, with all the other essential elements for fun in place—including replay value from unlocking secret characters and beating the Acme Events (specific challenges that earn goodies), a right on look, and solid control—Melbourne House has created my favorite Looney Tunes game ever.

Lagi breaks away from the GameFan rubber band every day at 6 o'clock sharp—no exceptions.

REVIEW

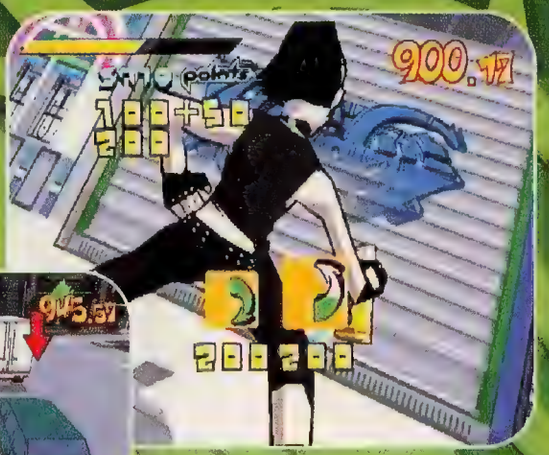
LAGI: RUBBER BAND: FRIEND OF SCRUBS, ENEMY OF THE HARDCORE.

DEVELOPER - MELBOURNE HOUSE
PUBLISHER - INFOGRAMES

1-4 PLAYERS
AVAILABLE NOW

VIEWPOINT SCORE: 85

Jet Grind Radio

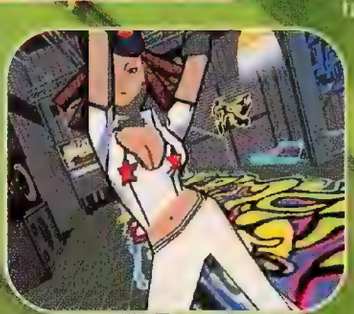


One hour into *Jet Grind Radio* (known as *Jet Set Radio* in Japan, as well as the bulk of the game), things were not looking good. The training missions, which gave you a preview of the upcoming level (as well as unlocking new characters), were strangely nitwitted to the end of each area. Combo and Cube, 2 of the coolest characters in the Import version, were notoriously absent, prompting me to dive into a paranoid rant the likes of which even Fury can't match (I have yet to hear the reasons why he refuses to fly?). To top it all off, the ailing camera problems, caused by making the left trigger both paint and move camera, were still prevalent. To try and tag a moving object when slightly out of range is to truly know what the meaning of the word 'annoying' is. I'd even heard that most of the sweet J-Pop music had been dumped, in favor of Rob Zombie and Jurassic 5 among others (more on that later). The game that garnered a 96 when it was an import review was in danger of actually dropping points and further proving that us Americans get second best every time.

A strange thing happened around that hour mark, though, as I progressed into the second chapter. Chapter One had introduced the GG gang, a group of fast, skilled and spontaneously artistic kids (read: taggers) who inhabit the fictional world of Tokyoto. In this shockingly amazing looking cel-shaded world, I had roller bladed through 3 different areas (all beautifully bastardized iterations of real world Japan), collected many a paint can, thrown down my tag on specific points and got the hell outta dodge just in time to stay one step ahead of the cops (call it the *Lupin III* effect, sans calling card). I'd even battled it out with a few rival crews, such as the Poison Jam, Love Shockers and Noise Tanks.

At that magic hour mark, Combo and Cube appeared on 2 entirely new levels (as if the 3 Tokyoto areas weren't large or cool enough already) in New York. Trust me, you haven't seen cool until you've rail slid across a pipe multiple stories above the ground on Grind Square (and this is where the domestic sounds come in). Like every other level, the New York ones are vast, detailed down to the lettering on posters and signs, while still retaining the cartoony charm that makes them a joy to play.

I hate to say it, but Sega's done it again, given you something that's better than an already fantastic game and yet another reason to own a Dreamcast. This isn't a 50 dollar game, it's a 200 hundred dollar game ($50 for the game, $150 for the DC), and, when combined with the fact that you can create/download/import your own graffiti into the game, something that will keep even the most jaded gamer playing for months on end.



Strange, the taggers in Kodomo's 'hood aren't nearly as 'hip' and 'hepwy'...

Viewpoint Score • 97	Developer - Sega	1 Player	KODOMO: Yet another 200 dollar DC game...	R Review
	Publisher - Sega	Available Now		

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PlayStation 2

Dreamcast

MATURE M Animated Violence Animated Blood

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KONAMI

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

It's In Our Nature To Kill Ourselves.

This is the most painful review I've written in a long time... literally. As I type this, both thumbs are severely blistered from my 'extreme skating' session last night, which came to an abrupt close around 2AM as a result of sore-thumb-itis rather than the need for sleep. Unfortunately, we weren't able to dedicate the proper space to the PS2 version of this game last issue due to time constraints (it only received a viewpoint). So now I have the monumental task of singing the praises of this mighty sequel in one miniscule page. To sum it up briefly, *THPS2* has better gameplay, music, depth, level design, and replay value than the original, which is already a legendary game. About the only things that are the same are the graphics and control, which were already pretty good and flawless. For those wondering, the DC version of *THPS2* is a no-frills port of the PS game, but at least there are no broken promises attached to this one. It's also the best version of the game, being high res and running at 60 frames.

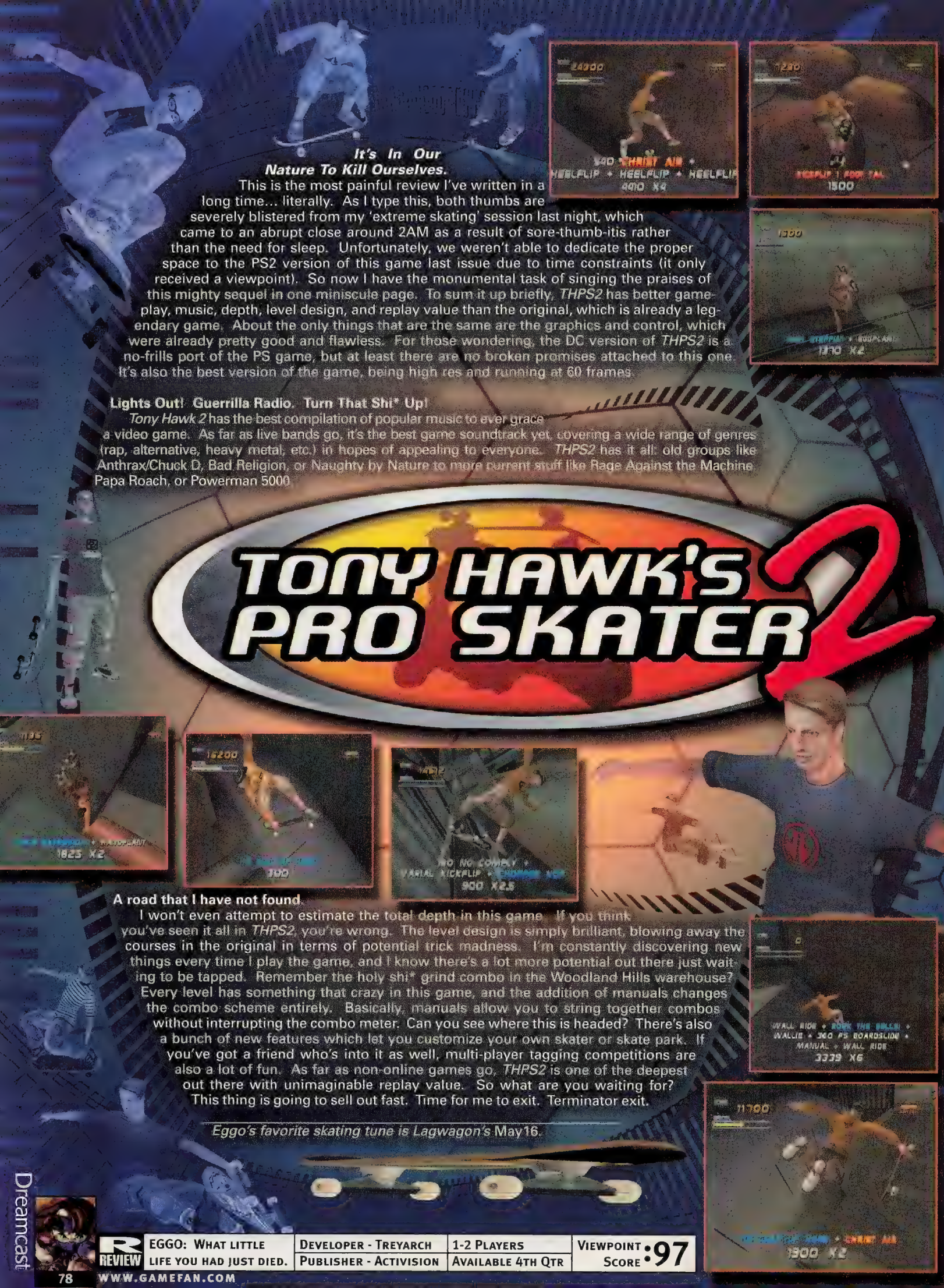
Lights Out! Guerrilla Radio. Turn That Shi* Up!

Tony Hawk 2 has the best compilation of popular music to ever grace a video game. As far as live bands go, it's the best game soundtrack yet, covering a wide range of genres (rap, alternative, heavy metal, etc.) in hopes of appealing to everyone. *THPS2* has it all: old groups like Anthrax/Chuck D, Bad Religion, or Naughty by Nature to more current stuff like Rage Against the Machine, Papa Roach, or Powerman 5000.

A road that I have not found.

I won't even attempt to estimate the total depth in this game. If you think you've seen it all in *THPS2*, you're wrong. The level design is simply brilliant, blowing away the courses in the original in terms of potential trick madness. I'm constantly discovering new things every time I play the game, and I know there's a lot more potential out there just waiting to be tapped. Remember the holy shi* grind combo in the Woodland Hills warehouse? Every level has something that crazy in this game, and the addition of manuals changes the combo scheme entirely. Basically, manuals allow you to string together combos without interrupting the combo meter. Can you see where this is headed? There's also a bunch of new features which let you customize your own skater or skate park. If you've got a friend who's into it as well, multi-player tagging competitions are also a lot of fun. As far as non-online games go, *THPS2* is one of the deepest out there with unimaginable replay value. So what are you waiting for? This thing is going to sell out fast. Time for me to exit. Terminator exit.

Eggo's favorite skating tune is Lagwagon's May16.

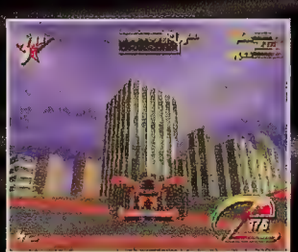


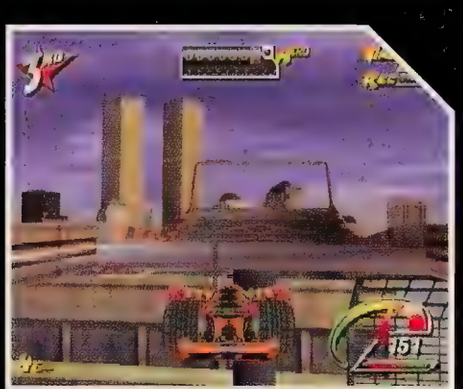
REVIEW				
EGGO: WHAT LITTLE LIFE YOU HAD JUST DIED.	DEVELOPER - TREYARCH PUBLISHER - ACTIVISION	1-2 PLAYERS AVAILABLE 4TH QTR	VIEWPOINT SCORE • 97	

Stunt GP

Is there anything better than driving like a lunatic at top speed? Sure, I can think of a few offhand (mainly involving soccer, chicks or some twisted combination thereof), but when it comes to the thrill of sliding around turns at top speed, Nirvana has been achieved. Okay, so maybe it's not really the Tibetan notion of "blowing out to nothingness" (funny how everyone uses that word as a synonym for heaven...), but it's a pretty good substitute.

Take that as a foundation, then combine with remote controlled cars and a meaty dose of stunt tricks, and you've got Infogrames *Stunt GP*. Developed by Team 17 (best known for *Worms* and making games that are meant to be *played*), the DC game is just now making the transition from Alpha to Beta stage, but looks totally on track to bring the goods come 4th quarter.





With 16 selectable cars (and a few courtesy hidden ones planned to boot) and **24** tracks to race, you know this one's going to be just like the good love making: namely, fast, deep and lasting a long time <alternate: you know this one's going to be around for the long haul>. Just like in most people's lives, *SGP* is about one thing: mad cash. Of course, you'll actually have to earn that cash by doing stunts during the races (thereby getting 'Aeromiles' for cash) and placing as high possible in the race. Once you do that, upgrading your car is only a spending spree away, leading to rides that are better, stronger and faster (for considerably less than 6 million dollars, no less.)

The in-game modes are also quite stout, with Tournament, Arcade, Freestyle, Stunt, Time Trial and more still unknown at this point. Better than that, the levels and the cars will be totally conducive to customization in the final game. Broken down into 2 categories (Speed Demons and Aero Blasters), your choice of vehicle selection will give you an edge in either speed or tricks. Also, the tracks will be filled with loops, jumps and overly pronounced lips, giving you ample opportunity to do as many stunts as possible.

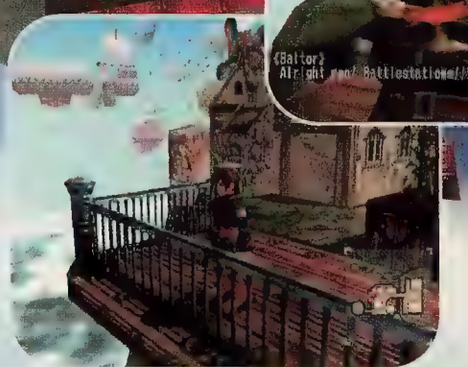
Right now, the game is still very early, with but a scant few levels playable. It's still a long ways off, but looks solid in both frame rate and graphics. You might not see *SGP* for a while, but when you get a chance to buy a Team 17 game for your DC (tell me you already have *Worms World Party*...), it might just be worth the wait. K

Developer - Team 17	1-4 Players	KODOMO: "Yeah, I once paid a hundred bucks for an RC Lego car! You gotta prob'm widdat?"
Publisher - Infogrames	Available 4th Qtr	

Skies of Arcadia

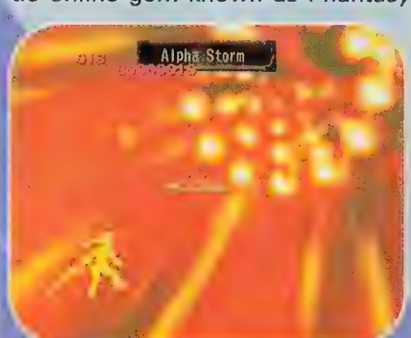
Wasn't the PlayStation RPG explosion supposed to end this foolishness? I guess Sega was too busy killing the Saturn and figuring out how to launch Dreamcast to realize RPGs are big business; indeed, here we are two years since the Dreamcast launched in Japan and we still haven't received a good RPG in English (the Japanese finally got something worthwhile with *Grandia II* this summer). Thankfully, the painful drought is just about over, as this holiday season will rain upon us two potentially Eggo certified Grade "A" RPGs: *Grandia II* and *Skies of Arcadia*, the subject of this preview.

Skies is a light-hearted drama starring Edge look-a-like Vyse, a young man with adventure flowing through his blood. His strong pedigree comes from the man he calls Dad, Captain Dyne, leader of the rogue blue pirates. The blue pirates aren't your run-of-the-mill rapers and pillagers, oh no. In a fantasy world filled with mysterious beasts, evil empires, and open skies, the blue pirates are the good guys. They only see fit to attack and rob military ships to support their families; think Robin Hood sans the green tights...



The plot picks up when Vyse and the gang pick up a mysterious female named Fina during a raid of a Valuan armada ship. Things twist and turn from there (I'll leave the spoilers to the other publications), resulting in a quest that has Vyse set out with his own crew in a quest to save the world. Sounds generic enough, but the quality is in the execution of tried-and-true RPG concepts. The story is engaging and solidly written, but doesn't take itself too seriously—the grandest compliment I can pay it is that I actually laughed out loud during the silly exchanges between Vyse and his female flirt Aika. Graphics are top-notch Dreamcast quality, the many lands and peoples you'll encounter are rendered as well as the main characters, yet the biggest treat lies in the battles. The term "jaw-dropping" is an understatement when describing the amazing effects that are invoked when special moves (that can actually be skipped!) and magic attacks are deployed. Speaking of battles, there are two types in *Skies*: up-close and sky ship to sky ship. The aerial battles are really cool as they not only offer an opportunity for strategy, but also add another member to your party, your ship (which must be upgraded and repaired just like any of your heroes!). The up-close battles are typical fare in form, though they do introduce the party spirit system—your party has communal points that are used to execute magic and special moves. Magic requires not just the right number of party spirit, but also individual magic points; the system for learning your spell focuses on moon properties (the usual elements) that can be applied to weapons.

Skies of Arcadia and *Grandia II* will put an end to the great Dreamcast RPG drought with what's shaping up to be excellent one-player experiences. Best yet, once these titles are played through, a little online gem known as *Phantasy Star Online* awaits in 2001. "Blue skies ahead captain—full speed ahead towards Dreamcast!" L



PREVIEW	LAGI: BLUE, BLUE SKIES I SEE!	DEVELOPER - OVERWORKS	1 PLAYER
		PUBLISHER - SEGA	AVAILABLE NOW

XTREME SPORTS™

Riddle Me This

Sometimes I just don't get it. A publisher of one division of a company makes a stellar product and the other division doesn't pick it up for publication. Case in point: Sega of America passed on the US publishing rights to *Xtreme Sports*, the Innerloop-developed, SOE published, uh, extreme sports title. Reminds me of the head shaking days when Sega passed on games like Shinobi Legions in America, instead handing the reigns to the dearly departed Vic Tokai. But since nobody can offer me a credible explanation as to why (Heck, the game still boots up with the Sega Sports logo **and** there's even a movie of *Virtua Tennis* on the disc!), I guess I'll just have to be content with Infogrames scooping up US duties—not that I have a problem with that, mind you... we are, after all, getting the game, and with Infogrames as one of the last heavy DC supporters out there, it's all good.

Do the Dew...<gag>

Now I have about as much fondness for extreme sports as Al Gore has for the truth ("Oh no, how could I possibly know about that whole Buddhist temple thing—I mean, just because I was there, uh, asking for money..."), but with Innerloop's apparently super-skilled coding abilities, that's all about to change. For one thing, this game eschews the usual annoying single event-driven gameplay that populates every other one of these insipid games since Sony published 2 Extreme all those years ago. No, what *Xtreme Sports* does is thrust you into marathon-style series of contests, with biking, ATV-ing (is that a word?), snowboarding (shocker), and hang gliding (YES!). You engage in no less than three of those activities in every race, and on occasion, all five. In fact, that's what *Xtreme Sports* more resembles—a multi-faceted racing game, across some of the most graphically intense levels to ever grace a console system... Dreamcast or otherwise.

See The World; Get Pummeled

Xtreme Sports takes place over three locales for each level of difficulty (easy, hard, and death)—Himalayas, Maui and Stryn. As you progress through the game, additional tracks are unlocked (by finishing first in Championship Mode).

Oh, and when they say easy, hard, and death (well, that's what I call it) they mean it! Easy is a joke—you'll burn through it first or second time through; hard is nails-hard... it'll take a few hours to come in first place on these tracks (bare minimum); as for 'death,' well, if you're prone to throwing controllers, pets, or smaller siblings, make sure you pad the room in rubber before setting out on these courses (it's odd that, despite being on the same ATVs, theirs are faster... hmmmm).

Hopefully this gets rectified in the final, because the AI seems a little cheap right now (except for the speed gliding sequences, the CPU opponents don't make mistakes). Thankfully, there's **no** rubberband AI—which means if you get left in the dust, you ain't catchin' up... this life time. Yeah, that's right, the game requires legitimate gameplay ability. I know, shocking, isn't it?

Home Stretch

So what we have here is a graphically shocking, super fun (provided they fix some AI issues) **original** racing game—yeah, a racing game I **love**, apparently it's miracle month at GameFan. We'll be back with next month with a blow-out review on what may very well be the Dreamcast's newest addition to the AAA club. **ECM**

Developer - Innerloop	1 Player	ECM: If only it were SegaNet compatible!!!
Publisher - Infogrames	Available 4th Qtr	

PREVIEW

Dreamcast

MAX STEEL

When in doubt, license it! That popular axiom led companies such as THQ and Acclaim into trouble in the distant past, but that doesn't mean companies won't keep trying to milk every cent they can out of something with supposed popular appeal. Witness *Max Steel*, one of Mattel Interactive's initial console efforts, developed by the lads over at Treyarch (also responsible for *Draconus* and DC *Tony Hawk*) and based upon the currently popular cartoon... and action figure line (and as we all know, the only reason there is a cartoon, is to sell action figures, right?).

Now it's no secret that the DC has been, how shall I say, lacking when it comes to games in the venerable beat-'em-up genre—heck, console systems in general have been devoid of a good *Spike Out*-style beat-'em-up for ages—so when we heard that *Max Steel* would seek to fill the void that *Soul Fighter* and *Zombie Revenge* failed to adequately support, we were a bit excited. After all, at least it isn't another DC rev of *Fighting Force* <shudder>.

At this point, *MS* looks good if a little framey. I'm hoping right now that they manage to iron this out, because as it stands, the frame rate bounces like a yo-yo. This, in turn, makes the game much more difficult to play as one second (and only one) it's at 60, then it plummets to the teens... I'll chalk this up to an early build, but then images of *Draconus* dance in my head—I need my meds!

Gameplay is strictly beat-'em-up with a dash of flip-switching puzzle action (though calling them puzzles is a lot like calling rain in SoCal a deluge). You'll make your way through some decently designed locales, with solid texture work and some decent lighting effects. The only glaring flaw is that the actual combat seems a little too limited in sheer variety of kicks and punches. Hopefully as the game wraps up they'll beef up Max's somewhat meager arsenal (then, of course, I'm reminded that it's based on a pretty cheesy cartoon... <sigh>).

So with mere months to go, hopefully Treyarch can iron out the problems *Max Steel* has and deliver a beat-'em-up that we can all be proud of. **ECM**

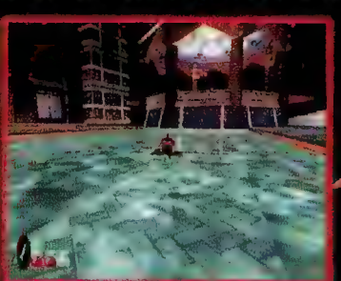
PREVIEW	ECM: Balls to the wall.	Developer - Treyarch	1 Player
		Publisher - Mattel	Available 4th Qtr

When I eventually get around to writing my memoirs (*I, ECM: Confessions of a Very Angry (and somewhat short) Man*), there will probably be entire chapters dedicated to topics such as 'Outrage and Me,' 'Frustration and Me,' and 'Why Mainstream Gamers Suck.' There would also be a particularly large entry on Jordan Mechner's *Prince of Persia*, one of the greatest games of all time.

Now I've owned the first *PoP* on PC, Amiga, TG16 CD, Sega CD, Genesis, SNES, and probably a few hundred other platforms that I can't or don't want to remember. So to say that I'm a *PoP*-phile is putting it mildly. So when I heard that the game was getting a facelift into full 3D, I was apprehensive. After all, since *Tomb Raider* had already somewhat successfully, ahem, borrowed everything that made *PoP PoP* some years ago, was there much ground left to cover?

Now that I've spent some time with the DC rev of *PoP 3D*, I can say that at the very least I'm a little intrigued. Everything looks decent, and the ol' climbing around and sneaking about gameplay that made the original such a classic is emulated remarkably well. Unfortunately, what made the slow pace of the original *Prince* so enthralling was the pacing, and that's where the new member of the family falls a few sneaky steps short. It seems that far too often you'll be simply confronted with not enough to do—and in video game land, that's a solid a death knell as they come by.

Still, there's time yet in development. If Mattel can iron out the pacing problems (please, please, please don't make it a complete port of the PC rev) they could have a solid 4th quarter outing on DC. I, however, will keep hoping that the man, Jordan Mechner, returns to us in true form with a blazing 2.5D rev to reward the faithful that still desire to walk the land of Persia, scimitar in hand, out to end the indisious reign of Jaffar once again (even if he is technically dead)... time to break out that Sega CD, methinks. **ECM**



PREVIEW	ECM: *PoP* it in...	Developer - Mattel	1 Player
		Publisher - Mattel	Available 4th Qtr

PlayStation 2

湾岸 MIDNIGHT CLUB STREET RACING

You know the rules, there are no rules.

RELEASE DATE: PLAYSTATION 2 LAUNCH

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Win the pink slips of opposing players! Rise up through the ranks in the illicit world of the Midnight Club.

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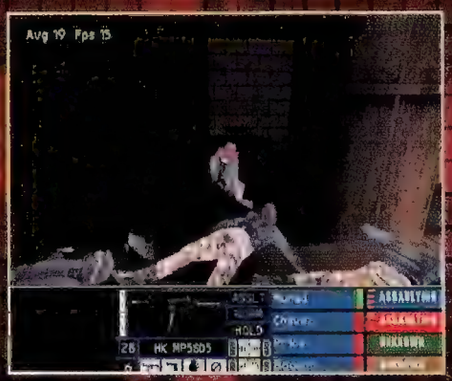
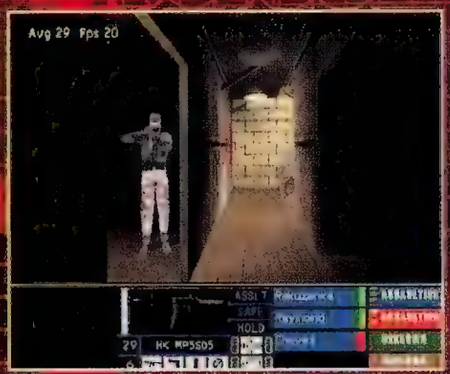
TEEN
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

counterbalance

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six
Rogue Spear





Basking in the joy of 'Machismo', there is, perhaps, no greater joy than busting up a terrorist encampment and sending each baddie to the grave with a flurry of bullets to the head. "If it worked for Schwarzeneggar and Stallone, then good enough for me," I thought, as I kicked down a door to a stronghold and was subsequently shot by 5 enemies. Yes, while the 'one man army' rules the movies, the world of *Rogue Spear* requires a little more patience and teamwork.

As part of an elite counter-strike force (Code-named 'Rainbow') in the very near future, you must engage in a multitude of actions to reduce the terrorist threat. When minor wars and conflicts have erupted in almost every area of the world. You must assist/eliminate/protect, depending on the mission, but always in a team.

Before each mission, you'll get a briefing and, subsequently, be able to choose almost every minutia of your strike force. After you select who's in the team, what weapons/equipment they'll carry and where they'll move to, the game shifts to a First Person perspective. You control one man during the mission, but can give orders and initiate a multitude of options on the fly.

Under the watchful guide of Tom Clancy, spy novelist extraordinaire, the *Rainbow Six* series rose to the pinnacle of the PC sales charts and, given that lofty title, expect the final DC product to impress as well. K

PREVIEW	KODOMO: SOLID SNAKE TIMES 6?	DEVELOPER - PIPE DREAM PUBLISHER - RED STORM	1-4 PLAYERS AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

The summer has come and gone, and, true to form, an animated Disney movie made over 100 million dollars at the box office. This year it was *Disney's Dinosaur*, and, thanks to Ubisoft, a Dreamcast conversion of the game isn't far off.

Some movie-to-game translations have little, if any, relation to one another in the final stage, but Ubi's staying true to *Dinosaur*'s roots. All of the top down perspective levels are gleaned from plot points in the movie, and are actually interlaced with full screen footage from the movie.

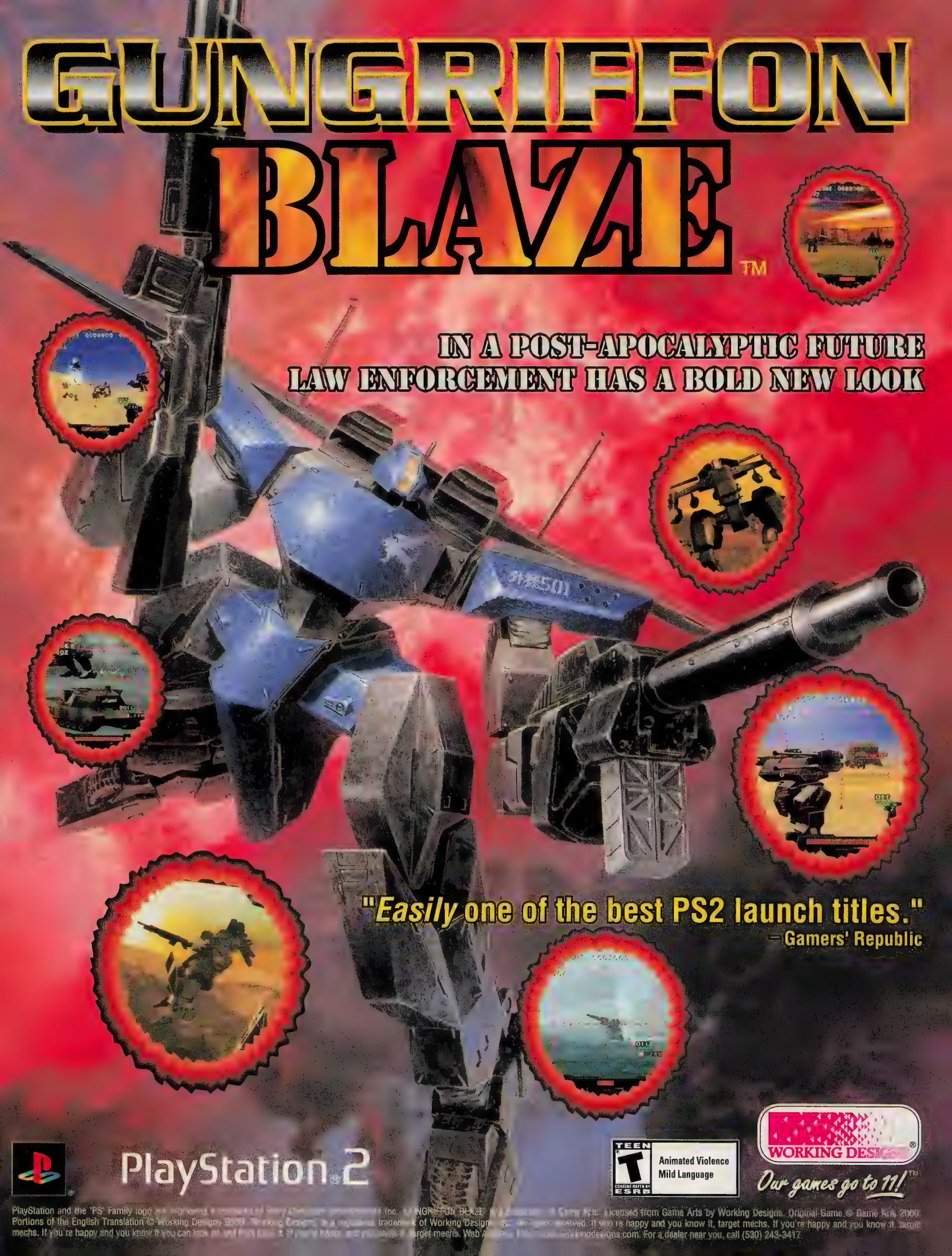
Walt Disney Pictures Presents
Dinosaur

Each level has different tasks (ranging from escape to locating items), but they all feature one common theme: cooperative play. At any given time, you'll command 3 characters (Zini the Lemur, Flia the Pteranodon and Aladar the Iguanadon), and can switch between them at will with the right analog trigger. Of course, there's a method to this madness, and a knowledge of each character's physical attributes and skills is germane to succeeding, be it massive size, speed or flight.

Right now the game is still early, with just a few playable levels, but we'll give it a closer look, before its fall release. K

PREVIEW	KODOMO: WELCOME TO THE OTHER JURASSIC PARK	DEVELOPER - SANDBOX PUBLISHER - UBI SOFT	1 PLAYER AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

GUNGRIFFON BLAZE™



IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC FUTURE
LAW ENFORCEMENT HAS A BOLD NEW LOOK

"*Easily* one of the best PS2 launch titles."
– Gamers' Republic

PlayStation 2

TEEN T — Animated Violence, Mild Language — ESRB

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COMING SOON

Dreamcast

One of the coolest games of the year is making its way to the Dreamcast, none too soon. While *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX* will undoubtedly be just as fun on the Sega system, it is clear from the preview version that it is little more than a port with better graphics. Oh, well, that shouldn't be such a big issue. The game still rocks! Next issue we should have a full review; I can already see The Judge wasting entire days playing it.

Dave Mirra

Developer
Z-Axis

Publisher
Acclaim

Dreamcast

I could cut and paste the text from the *Mirra* Coming Soon and it would be just as appropriate for this game. Another port of a pretty cool PlayStation game is making its way to the Dreamcast. Based on the movie, *Chicken Run* was not only a fantastic film but also has the makings for an impressive video game. Think Fosters Farm chicken meets *Metal Gear Solid* and you have the essence that is *Chicken Run*, the game.

Chicken Run

Developer
Dreamworks

Publisher
Eidos

Dreamcast

What might be the most anticipated Dreamcast game, to date, *Sonic Adventure 2* looks like it is going to kick some serious butt. Sonic Team has been very stingy with showing this title off, so very little is known about it currently. There is the appearance of Knuckles and Dr. Robotnik and probably some chao's, too. While you can expect online gaming components to *Sonic 2*, don't get carried away. There will be no high-speed multiplayer action...

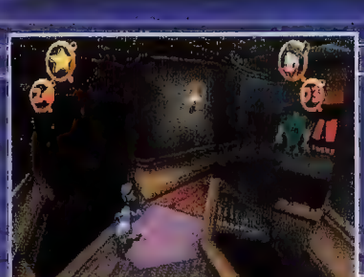
Sonic 2

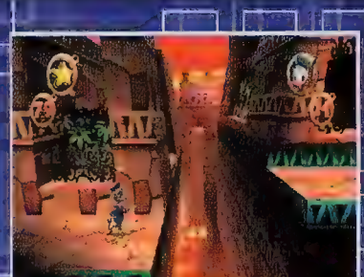
Developer
Sonic Team

Publisher
Sega

Dreamcast

Uh oh, could this be another port? Using the *Rayman 2* engine, *Donald Duck* is an unexpected title. One would immediately think a game like this would suck, but with its powerful engine and smart gameplay, the N64 version is actually a decent game. Let's hope this version can build on that and deliver another stellar Disney title, like such classics as *Mickey's Castle of Illusion* and *Aladdin*.





Donald Duck

Developer
UbiSoft

Publisher
UbiSoft

AS A MEMBER OF A RUTHLESS GANG OF SMUGGLERS, IT'S YOUR JOB TO EVADE THE U.S. BORDER PATROL, CIA, AND CUTTHROAT RIVALS TO DELIVER ILLEGAL CARGO. IT'LL TAKE COMPLETE MASTERY OF YOUR OFF-ROAD VEHICLE TO MAKE IT ACROSS UNFORGIVING TERRAIN AND STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE FORCES OUT TO DESTROY YOU.

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SMUGGLER'S RUN

PlayStation.2

- Levels are over 5 square miles, each with a "drive anywhere" environment filled with other smugglers and law enforcement officials.
- Choose from 35 different vehicles, each with unique modifications and strengths.
- Compete head-to-head or run "pick up and deliver" missions against AI opponents or in full multiplayer mode.
- Maneuver your way through arid desert, icy tundra, or rocky mountain forest.
- Real Time Damage Models allow you to watch the parts fly as you pay the price for punishing collisions!

RELEASE DATE: PLAYSTATION 2 LAUNCH
WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/SMUGGLERSRUN

SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON GUIDANCE RECORDINGS

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Advertorial

Online Console

Are you ready to serve up a big, steaming helping of humiliation to an opponent you've never even seen? Yes, there's something about the thrill of wiping the floor with a total stranger that makes the day seem brighter and the birds sing just a little louder. Take a moment to bask in the peaceful glow—then get online and kick some serious butt! Sega is the first and only company to bring you true, online, multi-player console gaming. As if that wasn't enough innovation, there's SegaNet, the first ever dedicated gaming ISP, which lets you dole out the damage in low latency peace. Check out just some of the ways you can make yourself feel superior, online and off:

SEGA NET™

Sega Sports™ NBA 2K1

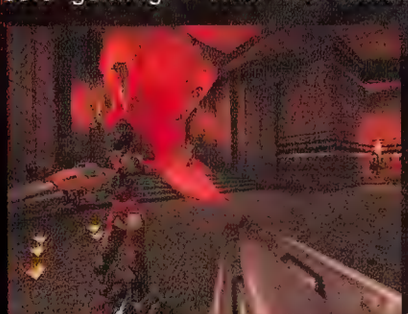
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

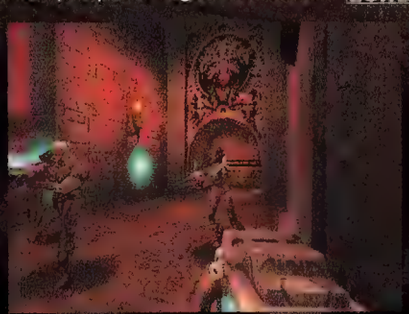
Gamers' hoop dreams have finally come true as Sega expands the basketball courts online. Forget what you learned in gym class, it's about a bag of chips, a phone cord, and a copy of ***Sega Sports NBA 2K1***. ***Sega Sports NFL 2K1*** proved to gamers that the only way to play sports games is on the Internet. Now ***Sega Sports NBA 2K1*** follows suit, allowing gamers to taunt, chat and play their friends or foes across the country in real time using their own ISP or ***SegaNet***. Featuring improved AI, street courts, crisper animation, more lines of commentary, added moves and the new Franchise Mode where players can draft rookies and make trades to create the ultimate team, ***Sega Sports NBA 2K1*** offers the most realistic basketball sim ever created.

Quake III Arena™

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

The eternal battle: Which is better, PC gaming or console gaming? Now the battle moves online with ***Quake III Arena*** for Sega Dreamcast. In another first for the videogame industry, ***Quake III Arena*** is the first game to allow multiplayer real-time networked gaming between Sega Dreamcast and PC players. Featuring new arenas and a redesigned user interface, ***Quake III Arena*** pits players against each other in an action-packed, free-for-all environment. Prowling through hallways and courtyards in gothic arenas and futuristic spacescapes, players will have endless options on and offline to keep them in the game.





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Advertorial

Gaming is Here!!

Sega Sports™ NFL 2K1

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When you get sacked online it hurts as bad as if you were actually being leveled by a 250-pound linebacker—but this time it's your pride that hurts, not your body. The sequel to the breakthrough sports title of 1999 and the first online multi-player game, ***Sega Sports NFL 2K1*** once again revolutionizes the sports game genre by moving the playing field online and allowing players to compete over the Internet via Sega Dreamcast. A whole new level of competition has emerged with online console gaming as the pool of opponents has dramatically increased. ***Sega Sports NFL 2K1*** continues to redefine superior gameplay with new features including an advanced running game, a better defensive system and the Franchise Mode that allows gamers to manage their teams over multiple seasons. Played on or offline, ***Sega Sports NFL 2K1*** delivers endless hours of gameplay. You may never leave the couch again—unless nature calls.

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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Prepare yourself for the ultimate online gaming experience. Revisiting the renowned ***Phantasy Star*** series, the first fully networked console-based RPG, ***Phantasy Star Online***, will connect gamers worldwide in a sci-fi fantasy universe featuring detailed 3D labyrinths and vast free-roaming landscapes. Players from around the globe will unite online via SegaNet to communicate and participate in various adventures in an online community unlike any other. Developed by Yuji Naka and his Sonic Team, ***Phantasy Star Online*** will revolutionize worldwide online console gameplay by breaking down the barriers of culture and language.

We know you want the best online gaming experience possible, and that means the lowest possible latency. ***SegaNet*** is the only high-speed console gaming network and ISP, which makes for a totally optimized gaming experience. Don't just take our word for it, anyone who owns a Dreamcast and has ***SegaNet*** enabled games such as ***Sega Sports NFL 2K1*** and ***Quake III Arena*** can sign up for 50 free hours on ***SegaNet***. Each game will walk you through the sign-up process. ***SegaNet*** members will also have exclusive access to contests, sweepstakes and special offers in addition to the best online gaming action.

The process is simple and easy. Plug in your Dreamcast, plug in the phone cord, sign up for ***SegaNet***, and let the online games begin. You can register with your PC via www.sega.com or through the Dreamcast console using the latest browser or online games.

If you decide to sign up for 18 months on ***SegaNet*** for $21.95 per month, you will get a check for $150—the cost of the Dreamcast hardware—and a free keyboard.

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PlayStation

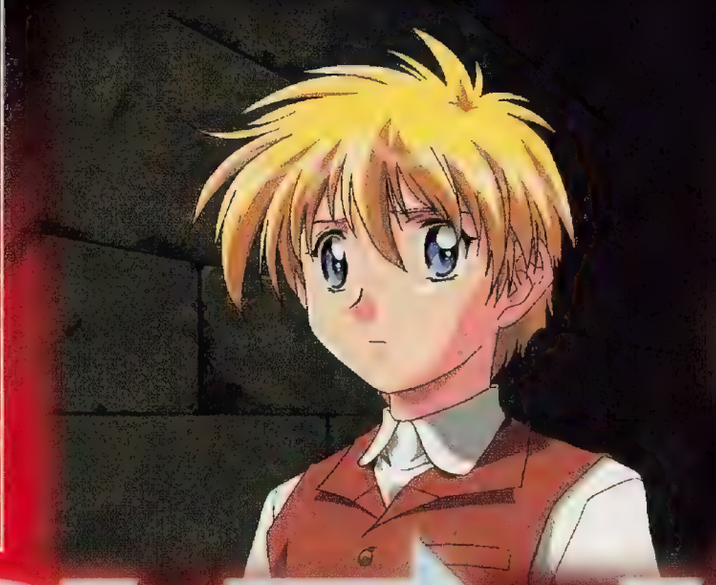
Reviews

Orphen ►
Silent Scope 92
Wild Wild Racing 94
Breath of Fire IV 96
Rollcage Stage II 96

Previews

Warriors of Might & Magic 99
Unreal Tournament 100
Rayman Revolution 102
Star Wars: Starfighter 103
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 104
WDL: Thunder Tanks 104
UFC 105
Chicken Run 105
Hybrid Extreme Racing 106
Torneko 106
Driver 2 108
Emperor's New Groove 110
WWF Smackdown 112
007 Racing 113

Right now, there's a big debate about RPGs 'round these parts, and, it's not about *Final Fantasy IX* (or *FF VII* and *FF VIII*) like you might think. It seems that as games progress and become commonplace on 128-bit systems, the actual act of playing a role has gotten smaller and smaller, often reduced to watching most of the 'game' and entering the sullen world of diminished returns. It seems that any game featuring a fantasy based storyline is immediately labeled as an RPG, when the majority would be more accurately described as 'reactive movies.' Such is the case with Activision's newly acquired PS2 game, *Orphen: Scion of Sorcery*, which goes one step further and creates a tech demo version of a digital comic.

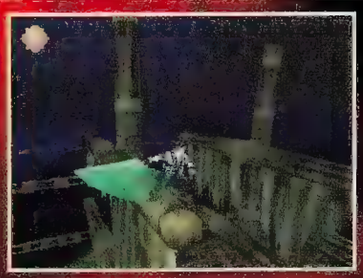


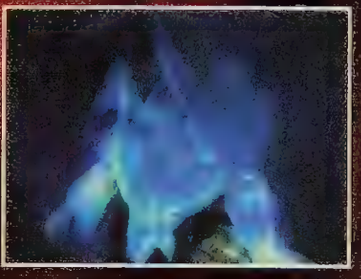
ORPHEN

After you get past the opening cinema (which is actually lifted from the anime of the same name and is of quality roughly comparable to the first few seasons of *The Simpsons*), you step into the world of average PS2 graphics, poor dialogue and the most impressive overuse of blurring effect ever witnessed. Best get used to them, though (along with the ear-shatteringly bad English dubbing), because *Orphen* is one thing and one thing only: consistent.

Unfortunately, consistency does not a good game make, and serves only to remind you that you have no control over any part of the game. You merely react to the situations that occur in the most derivative, linear manner. Don't want to help Zeus save his daughter? Tough luck, it's not optional. Trust me, when you have absolutely no input in the story, it's tough to press on, so this is all you really need to know about *Orphen*:

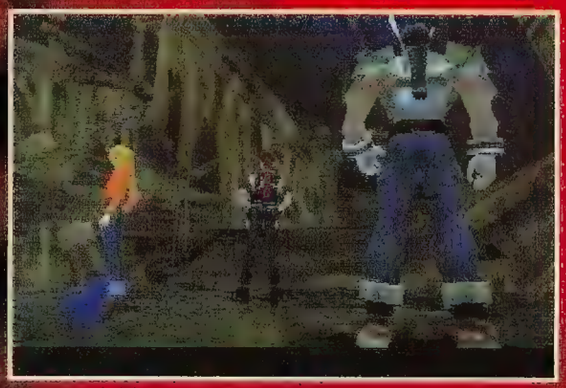
1) Watch real-time introduction to new area.
2) Complete some form of mild platforming, such as getting through a maze or jumping over water.
3) Watch real-time introduction to new enemy.
4) Battle until victorious.
5) Repeat steps 1-4 until you can no longer call yourself human and simply do anything and everything that people tell you to do. Congratulations, you're now ready to join Scientology.





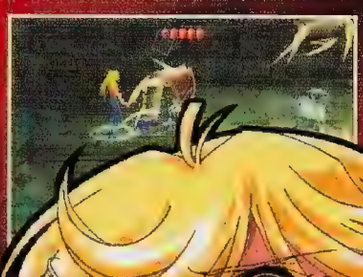
If you're expecting an advanced combat system to counteract the linear storyline, get ready to be really disappointed. Similar to the *Parasite Eve* battle system, both Orphen (and, later, his teammates) and enemy attack in real time. While using the D-pad to select between enemies, offensive and defensive spells are selected with one of the four buttons. This isn't quite as interesting as it might sound though, because you don't have any limitations on how many spells you actually cast, and beating any enemy simply becomes as tough as mastering when to use a block spell and when to use an attack spell. Or you could just take advantage of the massive bug that plagues combat...

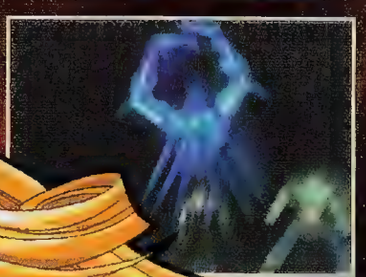
Ponder this: If you want to change your spells, perhaps the balls of fire just aren't cutting it and you want to switch to lightning bolts, the battle begins again. Yes, read that last sentence one more time. If you open up a menu and change weapon or spell, you and your enemy both begin at 100% health and are treated to the same pre-fight real time introduction that preludes every battle. If you start to lose, simply change weapon and start over again.



In the end, *Orphen* is doomed, thanks entirely to a lack of gameplay and *any* ability to customize characters beyond the standard item/weapon levels. Call it digital comic, linear adventure or even RPG if you like, I simply call it boring and a waste of money.

Kodomo's opinions on Scientology in no way reflect those of the rest of the GF staff. (Yeah, right.)





Viewpoint Score: 65	Developer - ESP	1 Player	KODOMO: When it's this bad, it has to be an *Orphen*
	Publisher - Activision	Available 1st Qtr	

SILENT SCOPE

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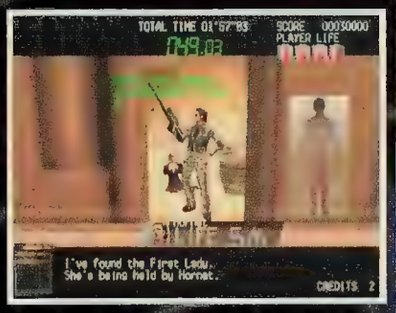
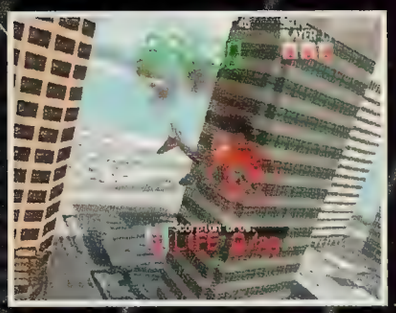


Generally, it helps to have a healthy dose of cynicism when dealing with greater (or is it lesser?) Los Angeles; what you see initially. In the short few months I've lived in Hollywood, my path has crossed with more actors and directors, masterfully disguised as waiters or valets, than I would've ever thought possible. What you see on the street isn't what you get at home.

And so it goes with arcade games, which fall into 2 distinct categories: those that are fun solely at the arcades, and those that are also fun when translated to a console. But when the main attraction of an arcade game is a multi-thousand dollar gun, and there just isn't any human way to bring that selling point home



(barring a 3,000+ dollar game), how fun is the game going to be, and more importantly, stay?

Well, in the case of Konami's *Silent Scope*, not very.

Hats off to Konami for attempting the conversion, despite the impossible task of replicating the arcade game's top attraction. The arcade version of *Silent Scope* featured said hyper-expensive plaything (a 1:1 sniper gun, complete with a zoomed-in mini screen in the scope), and crunched many quarters. The solution to bringing it home is to always have the view zoomed in (with a fully adjustable site, of course), allowing for quick switches between the two views with a flick of R1.

Reflexes are key too, as a band of terrorists have kidnapped the First Family, and it's up to you, the lone sniper, to bring them down. With a five shot rifle, you must shoot your

way through underlings (armed with MP5s) in *Virtua Cop*-inspired game play. With the 6 included levels, as well as several branching off points for bosses, expect to put a lot of time into the game on the hard settings (using no continues, of course).

You'll also find the obligatory time attack; shoot cardboard dummies practice sessions, which greatly aids in getting the rhythm of shooting down. Aiming while bouncing to and fro in a helicopter isn't quite as easy as the movies would have you believe.

Unfortunately, the game fails for one reason: Although the difficulty is enough to keep even the most ardent gamer at bay, playing through a game where the enemies move in the same way, in the same spots, time after time, really sucks. Lots of things are challenging (though not quite at *Silent Scope's* level), but chances are, only the fun things are going to get finished. Konami gets kudos for a faithful (if standard) translation, but the praise should be in the form of rental dollars and not buying dollars.

Kodomo would've scored this game higher if it were set in Hollywood and allowed him to pick off the morons who honk their horns at 3 am.

...STAND BY FOR YOUR NEXT ORDER OVER

REVIEW | KODOMO: How faithful is SS minus the sniper rifle? | Developer - Konami | Publisher - Konami | 1 Player | Available Now | Viewpoint Score: 70

PlayStation 2

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WILD WILD RACING

Last month, I was able to spend a day driving Jeeps in the desert and came to a startling epiphany. There are basically 2 types of off-roaders: those that sit in the back seat, complain about excessive speed and 'no seat belts' over the sounds of grinding metal and breaking fuel lines, and those that drive and care for nothing other than having a good time. If you're a member of the former, take solice in the fact that a 'safe and fun-free' lifestyle is entirely in your grasp. However, if you belong to the latter, step into the world of *Wild Wild Racing*.

Off road racing is the name of the game, fueling an interesting cross between rally racing and upgrade-revealing mini-games. At the outset, you choose between 3 vehicles, varying in both appearance and performance (accleration, top speed and handling). Each of the 3 areas will give you a distinct driving style, as the low handling car turns like a brick and the low top speed car will get passed on the straightaways, but deft driving ability in turns (consisting of a 'E-Brake in/acclerate out') will make a difference.

The 5 courses, including the wind-swept terrain of Iceland or the dense jungle of Australia, are fun to race around and visually decent, but are too few to fully appreciate. The Championship mode, divided into a 3, 4, and 5 lap free for all in Rookie, Amateur and Pro, forces you to race the same tracks each time (save for the single new ones in Amateur and Pro). Going around 3-5 courses over and over (even with different types of terrain and frequent shortcuts) will wear faster than a one-dollar pair of shoes.

Still, *WWR*'s got a few things that lift it above the weekend rental fair. First, the physics engine is pretty damn good. Take a sloping right uphill turn too fast, and you'll lift the vehicle up and out. Jumps, vital to winning at certain points, will throw you off into a side-roll, if you take them too fast and at the wrong angle. Finally, the cars and trucks themselves rank among the best rendered around (despite the fact that some look decidedly like RC cars) and feature independent suspensions.

While it's doubtful that *WWR* will win you over with its stunning looks, the fun and challenge of playing the multiple modes (Championship, Time Attack and Challenge) will last for some time. Don't expect white-knuckle speed or anything deeper than the average puddle, but it will please those looking for a fun game.

REVIEW

KODOMO: PS2-STYLE 4X4 RALLY RACING...	DEVELOPER - RAGE	1-2 PLAYERS	VIEWPOINT SCORE: 83
	PUBLISHER - INTERPLAY	AVAILABLE NOW	

Kodomo's idea of WWR used to be dodging bums and punks in Hollywood.

DEMONS DO EXIST

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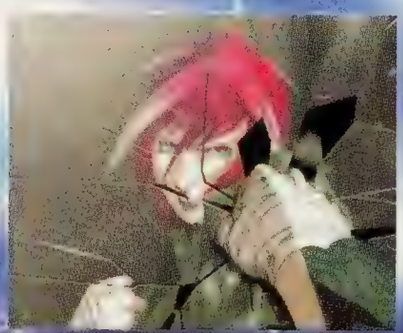
Change the fate of your characters by employing the revolutionary "Rumor System."



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AVAILABLE WINTER 2000

RATING PENDING
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PlayStation

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RPG

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BREATH OF FIRE IV

While Eggo and The Judge were fully involved with the now daily 'pre *NFL2K1* smack talking session,' I formulated a plan. Tired of being relegated to second choice on games, I decided to 'liberate' Capcom's *Breath of Fire IV* from the evil clutches of Eggo's office (a.k.a. "The Monument To All Things Squaresoft"). A quick comment about the Lakers' Glen Rice trade distracted him just long enough to get the job done, and I scurried away to my desk.

Visually, the game is top notch (*Square*-ly in *Tactics* country), with an incredible mixture of 3D landscape and 2D characters. The environments are large, blend multiple textures and can be rotated 90 degrees a pop with the shoulder buttons. Whether I walked through not so barren desert, camped in the wild or visited the simple, yet engrossing, towns, I realized that the backgrounds alone easily put *BOF IV* among the very best of the best on PlayStation.

The characters are also top notch, something that isn't a surprise. When Capcom does anything 2D, whether it's fighter, action game or RPG, you can count on the same fluidity and staggering attention to detail, on a micro-scale. Each playable character has hair and clothing that moves, as well as idle, attacking and defending animations. This is as fine a job you're likely to ever see with 2D characters in 3D backgrounds, surpassing the almighty *DQ VII* and the moderately good *Xenogears*.

Yet, all isn't well in—well, whatever the hell the world is called in *BOF IV*. As graphically pleasing as it is, once the game actually gets moving, things slowly morph from 'must play' to 'still waiting for fun to kick in.'

Don't get me wrong, this is, in many ways, a much deeper and more involved RPG experience than Square's *FF VII* and *VIII* (and I can hear ECM cringe when I call those 2 games RPGs), allowing for a fair amount of customization and the sanity saving choice to avoid most tedious, level building battles. Between the Combo system that allows you to link attacks and the Masters who teach you new skills, it's got enough variety to afford different options to different gamers.

Unfortunately for *BOF IV* it's the similarities with *VII* and *VIII* that feel more pronounced and, ultimately, drop kick the game from the ranks of the must own. The linear game play, drags on very early into the game and just doesn't improve. It seems that the developers at Capcom have attended the Indiana Jones School of travel, relying solely on the top down Map with circles and lines for visualization.

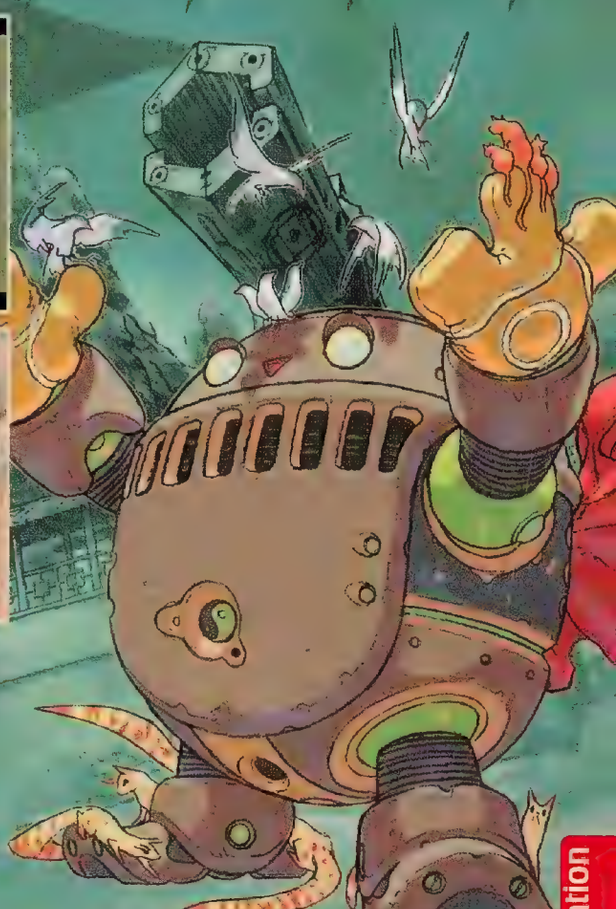
REVIEW | KODOMO: *Bad Breath of Fire?* | Developer - Capcom | Publisher - Capcom | 1 Player | Available Now | Viewpoint Score: 76

I'm not a fan of linear game-play, but I can handle it, because it's not quite industry standard to fully allow gamers to go and do what they want yet. Walking into any town to find out some information and being told to either: A) run around looking for children playing hide and go seek (bitten off *Grandia*) B) Talk to a lunatic Parrot who asks seemingly random, indecipherable questions or, C) do any one of a multitude of other lame tasks to get that information, gets mind numbingly annoying faster than you can say 'bitter ex-Brit.' There is no way to walk into a town, get the info you need and move the plot along without enduring at least one, oft times several, of these pointless side tasks, which are designed solely to pass time. Case in point, my conversation with an information merchant early in the game:

Him: Hello Traveler, guess my asking price in three turns and I'll tell you!
Me: 100 Zenny?
Him: Close.
Me: 200 Zenny?
Him: Wow, you are too generous! Do you want to buy my information?
Me: No. <I walk away and return>
Him: Hello, Traveler, gue— <sound of skipping text>
Me: 125 Zenny?
Him: Okay, I'll tell you for that price. The info you want is known by a man who is 5 minutes out of town, hiding in the desert. Find him and ask him!
<At this point, our Debug PS2's controller suddenly decides to try and morph into the wall surrounding my desk—strange!>

The plot, which takes much longer to introduce itself than necessary, is equally as frustrating. Opening with Nina and Cray's failed attempt to cross a desert in search of Princess Eriena, Nina leaves to find parts for the now-broken sand ship. It isn't long before she discovers a naked Ryu, stranded in the desert, and they join forces to find the parts. It's a weak premise and the underlying resurrection of a long dead king combined with the mysterious dragons that periodically appear (combined with many *Star Wars* elements) did little to draw me in. And don't even get me started on the fact that Ryu turns into a dragon in front of everyone (par for the *BOF* course?) yet no one seems to notice or remember...

Perhaps it's better to forget some things <cough>*Final Fight Revenge*<cough> and focus on the 99% of Capcom games that are better then anyone else's. It's certainly not a horrible game and does have redeeming qualities, but bogs down too much to warrant anything more than a weekend rental.



Even the mighty Manchester United Football Club loses... once in a while.

Ugh, I haven't felt this bound to vomit since that Cerberus-inspired Jäger binge at the infamous GameFan holiday party of '99—thank you *Rollcage Stage II*! As if being reminded about the 7 (or was it 9? Don't think we'll ever know) shots of Jägermeister I consumed on that fateful December night every time alcohol enters the fray at GameFan social gatherings wasn't enough, now I have Psygnosis' latest to bring up the same memories. Ironically, much like my holiday party experience, I'd recommend everyone give *Rollcage Stage II* a try. Huh? Well, what do you think immediately pops into my mind before being tempted to drink irresponsibly again? That's right, those shameful memories of making an ass of myself and ending the night crashed disrespectfully on the GameFan office's couch.

Rollcage Stage II should be given a go for an entirely different reason: to enjoy a light and graphically solid racing game on a system on its last continue. No harm done here, *Stage II* delivers racing thrills to last for the five-day Blockbuster rental period, giving you some entertainment while saving up for more essential products: PlayStation 2 and Dreamcast games.

A true rental through and through, *Rollcage*'s sequel is easy as pie to play; just hit the accelerator, nab those power ups, and go. Success comes immediately for those of us that have played our fair share of futuristic racers, just hit those speed arrows, don't mess up too badly and gun it. The hook of the series—being able to race on walls—integrates itself into the game without much trouble and feels completely natural. No new skills need to be learned here!

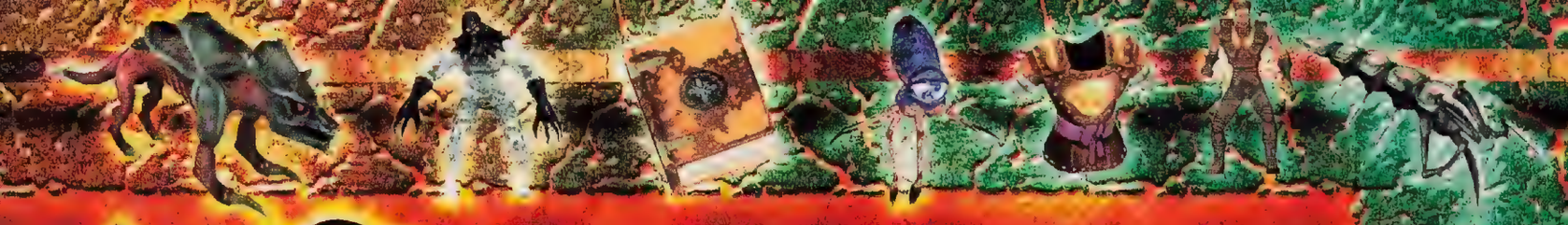
Rollcage Stage II's essential problem is that the game design is too complacent; everything is familiar territory, and it allows experienced gamers to succeed without much effort or thought. Additionally, failing to place in the top two occurred through random acts of racing, say my car reacting oddly to the track and getting spun around, and not through lack of skill. When this happened I just gave it another go, with the same racing strategy and skill-set, and proceeded to place in the lead. All of this is made easier by the vast abundance of speed boost power-ups and weapons power-ups littered through out the track, as soon as one set of power-ups are used, you'll be able to pick up another set.

With a game strategy that's limited to "stay on track, use power-ups as fast as possible, rinse and repeat," *Rollcage Stage II* is carried by its impressive (for PlayStation), but stomach-churning graphics. Things move fast and look good; the effects are as flashy as Shidoshi's E3 wardrobe, which is how they should be... Unfortunately, one power-up (the one that slows down all other competitors) is accompanied by an over-ambitious effect that distorts the screen, flashes light on and off, and quite simply should not be viewed on a full stomach or a light-head.

At the tail-end of its life, PlayStation is receiving plenty of games not worth more than five minutes of your precious time—that Rollcage Stage II is good enough for five gaming days is a pleasant surprise. My advice: pick it up with a DVD (to play on your new PlayStation 2 of course) for when that funky effect is just too much to handle!

Lagi's PlayStation runs like the cars in Rollcage: on its side and upside down!

REVIEW				
LAGI: One last roll on the PlayStation...	Developer - Attention to Detail	1-2 Players	Viewpoint Score • 78
	Publisher - Psygnosis	Available Now	



I once stated that 3DO should try and get more *Might & Magic* content on the console systems. They are great RPGs (even if they do run on outdated engines) and offer incredibly long and open-ended adventuring. Even the *Heroes* branch of that franchise is fun to play, allowing you to wage full campaigns, pitting armies of mystical beasts and warriors against one another.

Sometimes you get what you ask for and savor every minute of it. Most times you get what you asked for and regret ever opening you mouth. Last year's *Crusaders of Might & Magic* was an atrocious action title and the port of *Heroes of Might & Magic 3*, reviewed in this issue, is a perfect example of why PC ports just don't work. Am I gun-shy about opening my mouth in excitement for *Warriors*? You betcha.

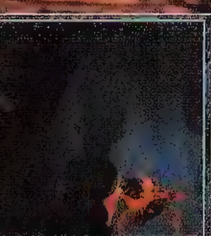
Warriors of Might & Magic is another adventure title based on the popular license and will, if nothing else, benefit from the developers' knowledge of what made *Crusaders* such a stinker.

War has ravaged the land of Ardon. Not the typical scars left by the clashing of steel, though, but deeper wounds, famine and plague afflict this world. Times such as these always bring out the worst in the human condition. Fear, mistrust and violence are mainsteys in Ardon. Like the Salem Witch Trials of the 1600s, many innocents fall victim to false accusations of necromancy and witchcraft.

So where do you fit in to this whole ordeal? Well, for starters, you too have been accused of sorcery and have been condemned and banished. You set out to prove your innocence and ultimately, the fate of the world rests upon your shoulders. There is a great evil brewing out there and it needs some smitting.

While it is hard to be anything but skeptical, considering the last adventure title sporting the *M&M* license, the power of the PS2 should add some oomph to this melee-based combat game. Chopping up baddies is a tried and true videogame pastime and, barring any major control issues, should leave *Warriors* sitting pretty. On the other hand, all of the real time lighting, particle effects and geo-mapping in the world can't help a game if the control sucks.

WARRIORS of Might and Magic



DEVELOPER - NEW WORLD COMPUTING	1 PLAYER	JUDGE: MIGHT THIS BE MAGIC?	PREVIEW
PUBLISHER - 3DO	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR		

Unreal Tournament

Unreal Tournament: one of the stoutest first person shooters of all time. A game that, at E3 though, was so busted I thought there was no chance for redemption. Well, I was wrong. *UT* is looking pretty damn good. Not as good as the PC version, mind you, but as good as you're gonna see, out of the gate, for a console system.

Graphically, the game is pretty much perfect. The character models, textures and weapon effects are all excellent facsimiles of the PC version, as well as each of the game's levels. All of the sounds, too, are those of the PC version, complete with the taunts, and damage amp screech and redeemer blast. All *UT* vets will be hard pressed to find anything to differentiate the PS2 version from the PC.

That is, until they start hunting bots. As of now, the frame rate takes a serious hit with more than just you blazing away. Get 4 or more guys in the mayhem, and the game freezes up while items are respawning and the game goes into slo-mo when only a couple weapons are firing. All of these issues are being dealt with, however, and with a little tinkering (and luck) should go the way of the dodo with some optimization.

For those of you who want a "true" FPS experience, you will be able to partake with a USB mouse and keyboard. While you *can* play with a controller, you will never be able to compete with an opponent who is using a mouse and keyboard. Without the quick 180° move that a mouse allows you, you are a dead man in a multiplayer battle.

Speaking of which, *UT* was always designed as a multiplayer frenzy and the PS2 does offer up to 4-player action. This is your standard split screen though, and the gameplay suffers because of it. FPSs are like RTSs: You need your own screen for it to work properly. And, with no SegaNet to support it, PS2 players will be either playing alone or playing on top of each other.

I could continue to gripe about why FPSs are fundamentally flawed when played on console but that is a tired, albeit true, argument. Without internet, the multiplayer is severely lacking and without mouse and keyboard the control is limited. Console gamers may not mind though. The product still looks as though it will be quite the stunner when it ships and when all you've really known are the likes of *GoldenEye*, an experience like this will blow you away. Next issue we will know whether or not they could fix the problems. J

PREVIEW | JUDGE: DON'T GIMME NO FLAK! | DEVELOPER - EPIC | PUBLISHER - INFOGRAMES | 1-4 PLAYERS | AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

TOMB RAIDER
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The Legacy
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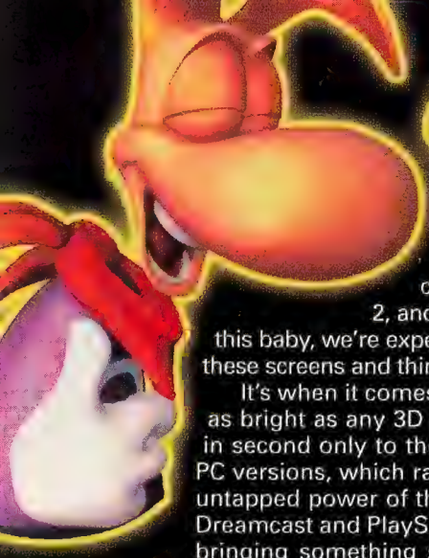
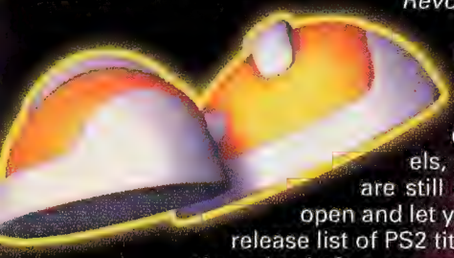


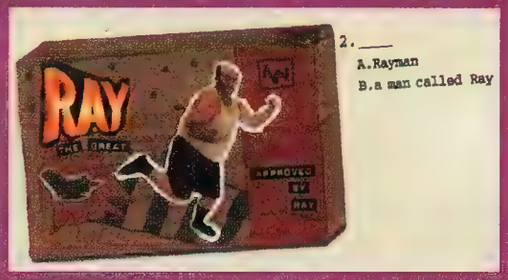
Rayman 2 is one of the greatest 3D platformers ever, easily rivaling the exploits of Mario and Sonic. The only thing it lacks is the brand name recognition of a Nintendo or Sega. Ubi Soft, well aware of the quality in this product, has wisely chosen to grace every console with a version of *Rayman 2*. The platform of choice for our limbless hero's next leap is the PlayStation 2, and with the raw horsepower of the Emotion Engine driving this baby, we're expecting big things from *Rayman 2 Revolution*. Just look at these screens and think of the 60-frames-per-second goodness that awaits.

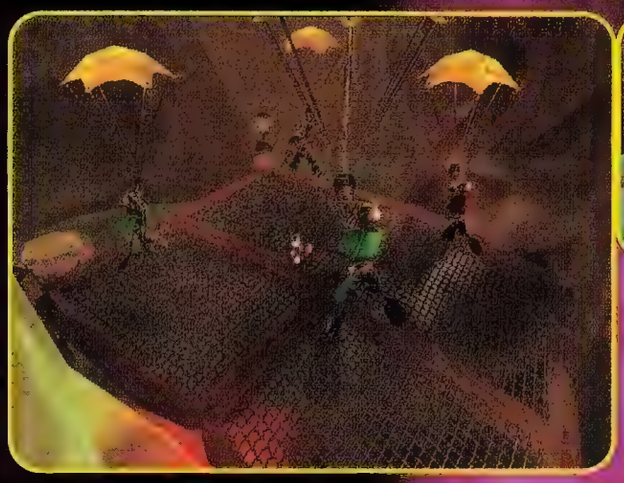
It's when it comes to gameplay, however, that *Rayman 2* really shines... as bright as any 3D platformer, if not brighter. The graphics, which come in second only to the gameplay, are stellar (especially the Dreamcast and PC versions, which ran at a liquid smooth 60 frames per second). With the untapped power of the PS2 available, this game can only get better. If the Dreamcast and PlayStation ports are any indication, Ubi Soft is dedicated to bringing something special to each version of the game, and *Rayman 2 Revolution* should continue the trend.

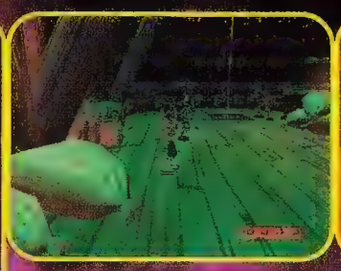


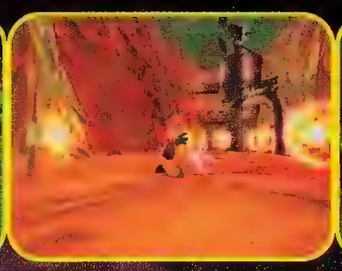
Boasting graphics that are at least as good as the Dreamcast version, *Rayman 2 Revolution* is basically the same game with a bunch of new goodies. We're talking secret areas to encourage more exploration, new character powers, additional levels, and character evolutions. Other gameplay details are still a bit sketchy at this point, but we'll keep our ears open and let you know as soon as we hear it. Looking over Sony's release list of PS2 titles to ship at launch and during the holidays, this is the only platformer coming out this year. At least it's a great one. E

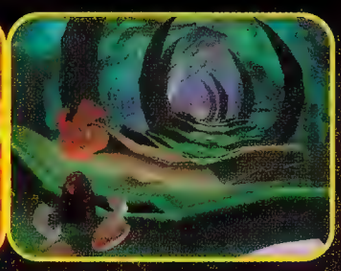
Ray the Game, the brilliant ad campaign devised by Swirl Advertising (as seen in the November issue of *GameFan* on pages 63 and 66-67) was, sadly... before its time. When I first saw an overweight couch potato striking swift, dramatic poses like Rayman for the mock *Ray the Game*, I was cracking up and telling people I'd like to play that instead. Unfortunately, *Ray The Game* was eventually replaced by the new human "Look-a-like-a-Rayman" ads, which aren't bad... but they're not *Ray the Game*. Ray may be gone, but he is not forgotten. He will live on in the hallowed pages of GameFan, and within our hearts...





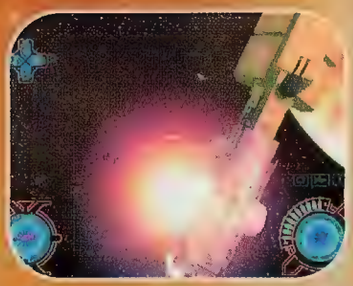


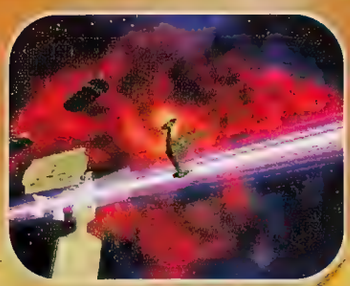


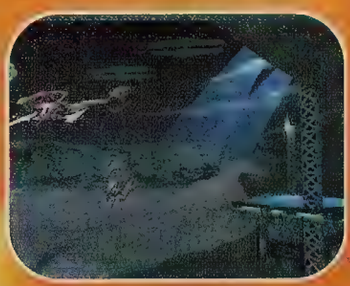


RAYMAN 2 REVOLUTION

PREVIEW	EGGO: LOOK, MA, STILL NO ARMS.	DEVELOPER - UBI SOFT	1 PLAYER
		PUBLISHER - UBI SOFT	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR.







STAR WARS STARFIGHTER

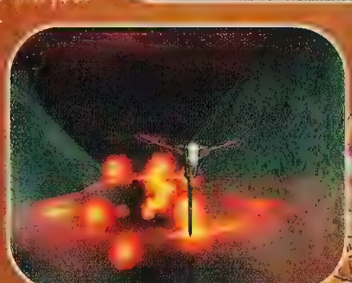
I guess when in doubt, stick with a genre you have excelled in. It is no secret that the majority of Star Wars games, over the last five years, have sucked. Sure, they may sell well, but you could stick the Star Wars logo on Rise of the Robots, and it would have sold 2 million copies. The exceptions have been the games that revolve around the SW vehicles, whether it be a racing title like the stellar Pod Racers, for the N64, or the space combat games, Rebel Assault. These titles have delivered the kind of break-neck speed and exciting gameplay that come as close to capturing the essence of the movie sequences they depict, as possible.

Star Wars Starfighter may just trump all of them though, using the power of the PS2 and the Dreamcast, to really send the game speed into hyper-drive (sorry about that).

You will play the part of one of 3 unlikely heroes, who have vendettas against those nefarious Trade Federation amphibian guys. The Naboo system is in their clutches and you need to do what you can to stop them (hmm, I thought they dispatched a couple of jedi for that gig). I guess before the jedi were dispatched, Rhys Dallows, Naboo pilot; Vanna, a Naboo expatriate and Nym, an alien pirate; were already on the case.

All of the action revolves around space combat and you can expect to face almost 50 different ships in dogfights. There are 14 different enviroments in which to pilot your crafts and the final showdown is an assault on one of the Trade Federation Droid ships.

An interesting gameplay wrinkle is the implementation of skills rewarded for performing well. Earn story threads, new characters and new enviroments for proving that you are one of the best fighter pilots in the galaxy.



Much emphasis will be placed on the story in Starfighter, but we all know that story has never been LucasArts' weak area. Gameplay is where they need help and it is still uncertain as to whether the final product will be able to deliver not only an engrossing story, but the kind of dead-on gameplay that is required to successfully pull off 3-D space combat. Could we be looking at the future of space combat gaming, blazing at 60fps? Well, I will keep my fingers crossed and just say that if this games blows, I am swearing off Star Wars games forever. I just can't handle another colossal let-down like Jedi Power Battles or Force Commander.

DEVELOPER -LUCASARTS	1 PLAYER	JUDGE: I COULD TAKE A SWIPE AT
PUBLISHER - LUCASARTS	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR	JAR JAR, BUT I AM JUST TOO TIRED.

PREVIEW

PlayStation2

ARMY MEN SARGE'S HEROES

Let's retread some ground here: Call me an old timer but when I was little, I *did* have army men. Before my Star Wars figures; before my G.I. Joes; before my Transformers—I had the little green and tan soldiers, frozen in combat stances. There was the mine sweeper, the general with his binoculars, the flamethrower guy, and my favorite, the crawling dude (don't ask me why, I just thought that was cool... I was only seven, so back off).

As I grew older and my playtime agenda shifted focus, I still found uses for the little fellas. Instead of staging my version of the Battle of Anzio, or the Black Forest, I was taking pot shots at them with my BB gun or watching them explode with cherry bombs (don't try this at home, kids).

Now I am even older (although some may claim otherwise) and my entertainment focuses have shifted even more. It's all about video games and DVDs now, and yet the army men are still lingering—this time in the form of digital code on my home console, trying to ride the wave of nostalgia that has gripped the nation.

The wave has carried them far. The *Army Men* series of games has done well for 3DO and they hope the sequel will make a splash on the PS2. Now, for those of you (like me) who have a hard time distinguishing the many *Army Men* titles apart, this is the action title that has you controlling "Sarge" as he single-handedly takes on the tan army.

He won't be alone in this one though; now you can play as Vikki, as well, charging through the 18 missions that take place on battlefields like pool tables, a toy store and inside a pinball machine. The graphics are a huge leap forward, but stiff gameplay (which marred the first) will be the Sarge's biggest obstacle.

Let's see if nostalgia can buoy this franchise any longer. It will take some stellar gameplay to keep this license alive.

PREVIEW	JUDGE: TIME TO CHOPPER IN THE T-BONES.	DEVELOPER - 3DO	1-4 PLAYERS
		PUBLISHER - 3DO	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

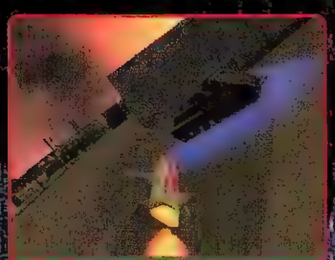
WDL WORLD DESTRUCTION LEAGUE THUNDER TANKS

In the spirit of *Death Race 2000*, *Rollerball*, and just about any car combat game, *WDL: Thunder Tank* takes you somewhere in the near future when violence becomes the national pastime. To feed our need for carnage, great battles are fought between heavily armored and armed tanks. All for our viewing pleasure during prime time.

The premise is tired but none-the-less a good one for any video game. It is still the best excuse to have you blowing tons of stuff up from behind the wheel of your [insert vehicle here]. When falling back on such a premise, however, it is an absolute must to produce a game that is worthy of notice instead of the tag as "another *Twisted Metal* rip-off."

You know the score. There are 9 combat-ready steel machines to pilot, with varying weapons, armor and handling capabilities. You can play single matches, against friends, or the World Tournament, which pits you against other combatants trying to complete certain level objectives, whether it be capture the flag, defend the flag or out-and-out grudge matches. There will be the standard complement of special weapons and pick-ups scattered about each of the 12 arenas.

Will *WDL:TT* have what it takes to rise above the pack? Well, from what we've played, the game has some good (not great) graphics, some cool weapons and the ability to destroy almost everything in the arena (my personal fave is using your vehicle to burrow holes in buildings). The vehicle control is not as extensive as I would like to see, but the game is still early. You are dealing with vehicles that use tank treads, so expect a lot of turning on your axis. Expect this version to be much better in gameplay than its PlayStation counterpart, which is clumsy.



PREVIEW	JUDGE: TODAY THIS SPORT IS CALLED "MONSTER TRUCKS."	DEVELOPER - 3DO	1-4 PLAYERS
		PUBLISHER - 3DO	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

CHICKEN RUN

I know what you're thinking. This game must be complete ass. I don't blame you, I thought the very same thing. I mean when was the last time a game drawing so much from its movie source material was actually any good? And *Chicken Run* follows its movie source material almost to the letter.

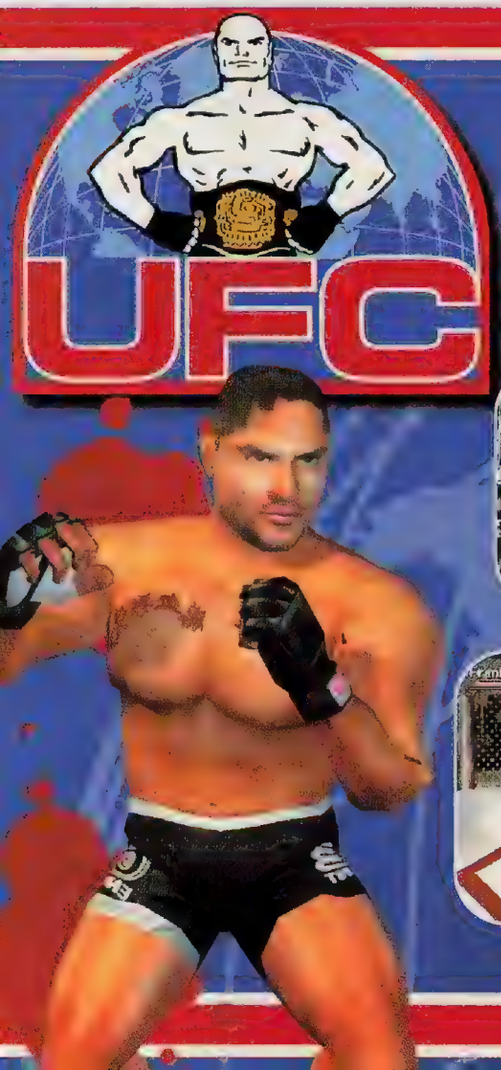
Imagine my shock when I started playing only to discover that it was quite good. Not only is it using a pretty good engine and utilizing some good gameplay mechanics, it also retains all of the humor and personality which made the movie so appealing. And no, just because it is Eidos does not mean it is *Tomb Raider* with chickens.

If you saw the movie you know what you're in store for. You play the part of Ginger, and the object is to get out of the Tweedy chicken farm. With the help of you fellow fowl, Mac, Babs and that flaky Yankee, Rocky, you must concoct crazy escape plans to try and outwit Mr. And Mrs. Tweedy, as well as their vicious hounds.

More of a scavenger hunt game than anything else, you can help but draw some funny parallels between *Chicken Run* and *Metal Gear Solid*. Ginger is all about stealth, slinking around in the dark trying to avoid the line of site cones of your enemies. Gather items for Babs to sew into disguises and tools for Mac to use for contraptions. Even partake in mini-games like the egg catch, which offer their own enjoyment and brand of humor.

Keep your eyes out for this title and try to remember to look past its name. *Chicken Run* is not just a cash-run knock off. It is a zany little title that looks to have all of the key elements for a solid game.

DEVELOPER - DREAMWORKS	1 PLAYER	JUDGE: WHEN FOWL RUN AFOUL, THINGS GET NASTY...
PUBLISHER - EIDOS	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR	PREVIEW

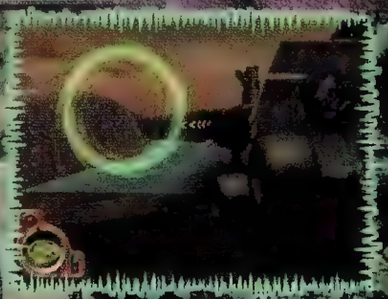


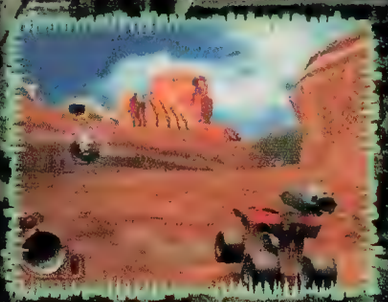
Often times, when you see a game released across multiple platforms, you're dealing with either straight ports or, in the case with most DC conversions, moderately souped up revs. But for a company to hire two separate development teams, to craft what is essentially the same game, is nearly unheard of. Case in point, Crave's *Ultimate Fighting Championship*. Fact is, if you've had a chance to see what wonders Japanese developer Anchor was able to pull off on a GD ROM, you might be a bit curious (or very afraid) of how a PS-powered rev would fare. Well, I've had an opportunity to sit down with a preview copy of the Opus developed UFC, and I've got to admit: While there is no comparison graphically, PS loyalists might just end up with one of the better grapplers to hit Sony's aging poly pusher.

Ok, so we're not dealing with the Saturn vs. the PS here. Fact is, if you're a fan of mixed martial arts and don't own a Dreamcast, this version of *UFC* will likely suffice... just stay as far way from the DC build as possible! While Opus has done a decent job of modeling the facial textures (and a bit of added spit and polish is still likely) the PS version's selling point will instead reside in the actual combat. Don't expect Opus to cut corners in this department... all of the insane grapples and strikes of the real UFC will be included as well as an all-star lineup of combatants. So things are looking pretty good at this point, and if everything continues down the same path, Crave just might land two kick-ass versions of the *Ultimate Fighting Championship*. Now how about a PS2 rev starring Tank Abbot?

DEVELOPER - OPUS	1-2 PLAYERS	FURY: TAPPING OUT IS NOT AN OPTION... UNLESS IT REALLY HURTS.
PUBLISHER - CRAVE	AVAILABLE NOW	PREVIEW

Hybrid Extreme Racing



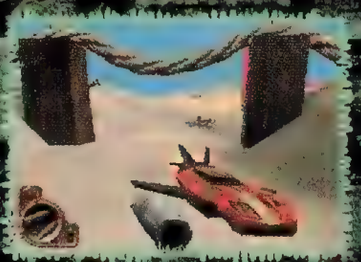


Like Lego or Hasbro, Mattel is trying to bank on some of its toy licenses to help cement itself a piece of the video game market. While they are also creating original product, expect to see many titles sporting the Tyco, Hot Wheels and (probably) Rock 'em Sock 'em Robots trademarks (and let's not forget Barbie).

The newest title is a kind of combat racer using the Hot Wheels license. *Hybrid Extreme Racing* is just what its name implies: a hybrid racing title. Expect single and multiplayer racing complete with power-ups, vehicle transformations and car upgrades. You're not just racing against other cars, but designing your own vehicle so it is best suited for the tracks you race.

There will be a total of 9 courses, which will feature radical environmental changes. Your vehicle will need to transform into a boat, plane, and off-road car throughout the tracks. Knowing what elements are the most predominant and then customizing your car to meet those conditions is the key to success.

The ability to customize your car and transform it as you race may help give *Hybrid Extreme Racing* some legs. Right now the game still needs some work—especially in the area of graphics. A game like this could really benefit from the power of the Dreamcast or PS2. Imagine all of the different cars from the Hot Wheels library they could put in! That would really be something.



PREVIEW	JUDGE: Only sissies play with Matchbox cars...	Developer - Mattel Publisher - Mattel	1-2 Players Available Nov 24

Torneko: The Last Hope

If you don't follow game sales in Japan, *Torneko* was big... we're talking 600,000 copies big. Or perhaps you've heard of *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon 1 & 2* (which were inspired by *Torneko*). Those games together sold over a million copies in Japan. So though you may have never heard of this game, it's got quite a history in Japan.

I wasn't that crazy about the gameplay in *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*, but I'm actually excited about playing *Torneko*, even though it's not set in the highly appealing *Final Fantasy* world. Instead, *Torneko* takes place in the *Dragon Quest* universe (think Akira Toriyama, character designer for *Dragon Ball* and *Chrono Trigger*), full of monsters such as: slimes, wyverns, zombies, and more. But that's not why I'd rather play *Torneko* than *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*. *Torneko* has better gameplay.

You're still exploring randomly generated dungeons and battling monsters in quick, turn-based combat, but much of the tedium is removed by simple feature (auto-mapping an entire room as soon as you enter it or quick button presses to get diagonals). The graphics and music are also well done. Though *Torneko* is geared towards a younger audience, it has a high addiction factor, and I'm interested in playing it more when the reviewable comes in soon.

PREVIEW	EGGO: The Monsters Under the Stairs...	Developer - Chun Soft Publisher - Enix	1 Player Available 4th Qtr

Where Fingerprints would be if controller wasn't gripped so hard.
Friction burn got after getting in Hygog's Face.
9 stitches. Exactly 12 less than I gave Qubeley.
Minor blisters earned during 8-hour marathon.
Pepperoni pizza stain From all-night tournament vs. Hydra.
Gash got going toe-to-toe against Psycho.

THE GAME IS IN 2-D. THE PAIN ISN'T. IT'S THE EPIC STORY OF GOOD VS. EVIL IN CLASSIC 2-D. YOU ARE HEERO YUY, IN YOUR FIRST VIDEO GAME EVER. YOUR JOB; USE YOUR POWERFUL WING GUNDAM TO PROTECT HUMANITY FROM THE SINISTER GIANT MOBILE SUITS. DO YOU HAVE THE BRAIN POWER AND STAMINA NEEDED TO DEFEAT THE EVIL MACHINES? OR DO WE CALL YOU MR. SOFT HANDS? GUNDAM BATTLE ASSAULT. OLD SCHOOL GAME-PLAY. NEW SCHOOL PAIN.

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PlayStation

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence

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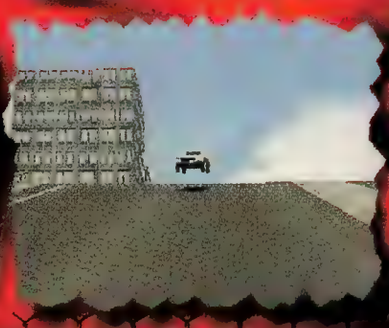
DRIVER2



We were all a little shocked at the runaway success of *Driver*. Not on the same level of shocked as we were with *Frogger* or *Superman*, but shocked nonetheless. It was heralded as being the 3D incarnation of *Grand Theft Auto*, but seemed to lack much of the personality which made that an office favorite. Repetitive missions, repetitive scenery and what ended up being a very repetitive practice mode (Eggo spent quite a lot of time in that parking garage).

This game is head and shoulders above its predecessor. The engine has been refined into a very impressive PlayStation engine that not only allows them to run the game at a solid frame-rate, but enables the designers to incorporate curved roads (you did notice the first was all on right angles, didn't you?) a multitude of cars, some pretty cool cityscapes and more lively pedestrians (hehehe, I hope they can dodge well).

Another big addition is incorporating the ability to let Tanner get out of the car. Granted, it is a small part of the overall gameplay (about 15% compared to a beefy 85% driving) but it does add a wrinkle, breaking up the monotony of driving and making missions more versatile.

The story is very cool, as well—something developers hope will draw the gamer deeper into the action. Tanner is caught in a drug war between a Brazillian drug lord and a Chicago mobster. Blood will be shed in the streets of Havana, Las Vegas, Chicago and Los Angeles. The cut scenes give the game a very cinematic feel and are integrated into the game in a way that makes you feel as though you are in a compelling movie. One in particular shows a barroom execution complete with thugs popping off shotguns and fat guys cowering.

If you were one of the multitude of fans that fiended over the first version, partaking in *French Connection*-style car chases and toiling for hours creating your own replay movies, then *Driver 2* should be at the top of the old Christmas list.

PREVIEW | JUDGE: FASTER THAN A SPEEDING *BULLITT*... | DEVELOPER - REFLECTIONS | PUBLISHER - INFOGRAMES | 1-2 PLAYERS | AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

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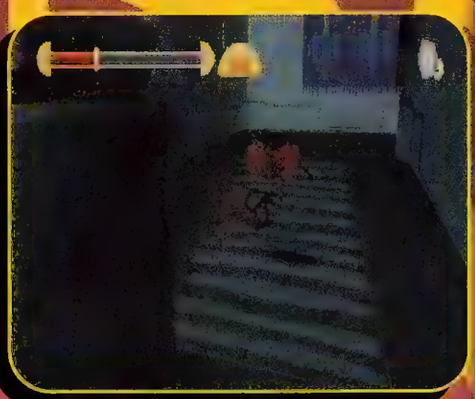
Disney's THE EMPEROR'S NEW GROOVE

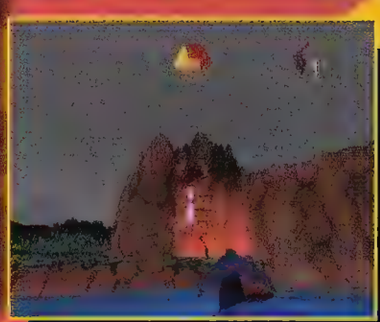
While I can't claim to be a Disney fanatic (side note, beware of a special breed of Disney freak out there, not the young child/sane parent variety, but a unique, balding, frightening and evil as a Jafar-Scar-and-Gaston-combined specimen), I have been known to enjoy their popular feature films. As of late, the name "Disney" strikes up fond memories of viewing *Aladdin* and then playing the gaming accompaniment to the film, a delightful 2D Genesis side-scroller that successfully merged the essence of the film with platforming action. Sadly, PlayStation-era Disney games have yet to reach the standard set by *Aladdin* and *Mickey's Castle of Illusion*, though things are finally going in the right direction; *Tarzan* almost had it last year, and now perhaps the latest effort, *The Emperor's New Groove*, can deliver a great PlayStation Disney game.



For those of you who don't keep up with the latest happenings at the Mickey Mouse studio, *The Emperor's New Groove* is Disney's try at the David-Spade-with-fat-guy-sidekick formula (John Goodman steps in to fill Chris Farley's funny and fat shoes). The plot of the animation is followed closely by the Argonaut developed game: it has the smart ass emperor Kuzco (Spade) turned into a llama by his evil advisor Yzma. Obviously this isn't going to fly in the good-always-prevails world of Disney, so Kuzco enlists the help of Pacha (Goodman) to reclaim the throne. Hence, 90 minutes of wacky adventuring fills up the silver screen while 3D platforming action ensues on PlayStation.

To get an idea of *The Emperor's New Groove* game form, think Spyro minus the flying and taken down a notch for the Disney audience. Indeed, Argonaut is faced with the not-so-enviable task of providing an adventure challenging enough for the hardcore gamer while still enjoyable for the casual players looking for an interactive extension of the latest Disney flick. Fortunately, unlike most of the editorial staff during the last few hours of the work-week, Argonaut is trying hard to achieve their task: The game is amusingly self-aware as it runs down the basic play mechanics (jump kick for stomping, collect red idols to open red doors, etc.), knowing a good many of us just want to get to the hot and heavy action that awaits past the introductory stages.

After an extensive play session with *The Emperor's New Groove*, my expectation is for a solid adventure to complement what's sure to be a solidly amusing Disney comedic romp this winter. If it all comes together just so at Argonaut and the final product yields a better camera while kicking up the graphics, then *New Groove* might be one to add to the best Disney film to game conversions list.



PREVIEW	LAGI: How Disney got its Groove back...	Developer - Developer	1 Player
		Publisher - Sony	Available Dec

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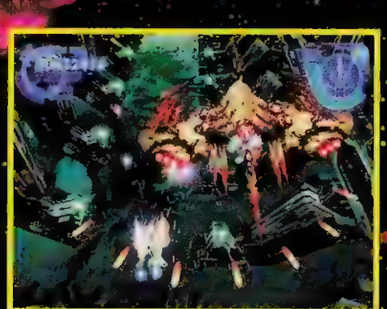
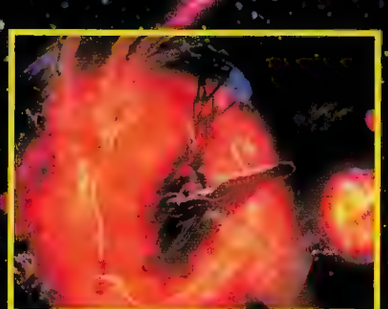
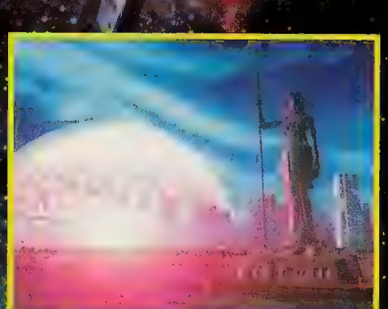
THE LOST PLANET

Believe in Your Pilots
Hope for the Best
Pray for a Savior

"A visual feast for PS2 owners...in shooter heaven."
– Gamers' Republic



PlayStation 2

TEEN T Animated Violence Mild Language
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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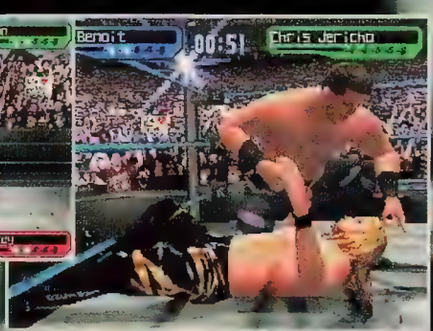
WWF SMACKDOWN 2

I think we've come a long way since the days when the anti-wrestling crowd (at one time myself included) felt it necessary to consistently utter the words "But you know it's not real, they're just acting." Hmm, that's funny, I took theater in high school and no one taught me how to break a chair over some guy's head. Yup, with nationwide acceptance growing on a daily basis as the WWF, WCW, ECW and a slew of other factions grow into multi-million dollar franchises (hell, some organizations ain't too far from attaining that billion dollar mark), it's certainly an ideal time to be into wrestling and, even better, wrestling games. But with so many game companies entering the virtual ring these days, it's hard to wade through the crap and well, more crap. Luckily for the sake of the true fans, who aren't content with the likes of... (ok, I'll just say it) pretty much the entire stable of Acclaim's 32-bit wrestling titles, companies like THQ have made a name for themselves delivering quality brawlers and ensuring that the teams responsible are above all, masters of their craft. With renowned developers like Yukes and Aki at the helm, THQ has landed three respectable wrestle fests including *WWF Smackdown*, *Wrestlemania 2000* and *WWF Royal Rumble* and are nearing completion on their fourth offering, *WWF Smackdown 2*.

Well, unless you're still recovering from a massive 2x4-induced concussion (and, after seeing a segment on Real TV about amateur "backyard" wrestling, I know I'm not that far off... Billy Bob), you've probably been keeping a close eye out for *Smackdown2*. But is this one gonna just be another basic sequel with a few added elements thrown in for good measure (I think we're all past alternate costumes and basic create-a-wrestler functions)? Remember, this is the games industry, where less is generally favored above more. So what's gonna make *S2* a contender? How's five brand new gameplay modes such as Ladder Matches, Hell in a Cell, Casket Matches, Tornado Tag Team etc., a ton of new characters (over 50 electrifying personalities), create a-Pay-Per-View (uhh, believe it or not) and backstage mayhem sound? Huh, not satisfied eh? All right, how about a create-a-manager mode to help tip the scale for ya? Yeah, forget **being** the Rock, I wanna a nice slice of his earnings!

Looking past all the creation functions and varied gameplay options, *Smackdown 2* still maintains the rabid pace found in its predecessor, and with the improved roster and some new double-team moves, fans are certain to have little complaint in the action department. Graphically, characters don't appear to have received much improvement but considering the quality of the models in *Smackdown*, it really doesn't hamper the package. So, from the look of this early preview build, Yukes has again demonstrated their prowess as one of the premiere wrestling developers in the field—the standard has definitely been set for domestic grapplers! F



PREVIEW

FURY: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME... UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING TO *BLEEEED*!

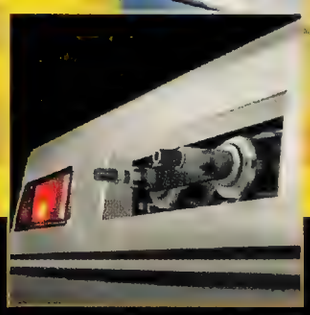
DEVELOPER - YUKES

PUBLISHER - THQ

1-4 PLAYERS

AVAILABLE NOV

007 Racing



Chances are, you've played quite a few video games based on Ian Fleming's James Bond. Whether it's the first person shooters or the 3D action/adventure variety, you seen everything that any Bond fan could want, right? You've already shot your way through *GoldenEye*, *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *The Worst Bond Movie Ever Made* (aka *The World is Not Enough*), so there's nothing else to look forward too, right? Well, think again, because Electronic Arts is getting ready to throw a curve ball into the mix with *007 Racing*, an action adventure game where, well... you drive as James Bond.

If you were somehow in possession of the misguided belief that being James Bond is easy (even with all the people dying around him and the stigma of *still* trailing Wilt Chamberlain), you need to know a few things. The poor chap can't even get into one of his many cars these days (such as the *TWINE*'s BMW Z8 and *Goldfinger*'s Aston Martin DB5) without getting into trouble. Since the game is exclusively car based, you can expect all the standard Bond car options, such as: machine guns, missiles, lasers and nitrous oxide boosts.

Despite the heavy firepower, not all of the missions will be shoot to kill. While there are some, such as rescuing a kidnapped woman or fighting with other vehicles, you'll have just as many that focus on timed events. The focus isn't exclusively on aggressive tendencies, but also guile and quick relexes, true to the James Bond style. The secret agent who crashes through a castle gate and charges a tank in his car doesn't stay secret or alive for very long.

Right now, the game is in the first playable Alpha form and has a long ways to go before eventually landing on the PS, but *007 Racing* is definitely shaping up nicely. It's still quite a work in progress, but you can expect no fewer than 15 levels in the final game. If the graphics can catch up to the current solid control and size of levels—and I don't see any reason why EA can't do this—we'll get one of the most unique and best Bond games to date come this Fall. **K**

Developer - Eutechnyx	1 Player	KODOMO: James Bond: an Englishman with good teeth!
Publisher - EA	Available 4th Qtr	

COMING SOON

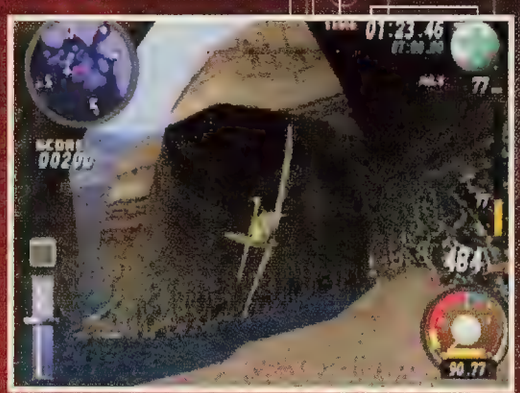
The most poular racing franchise (if you can really call it a franchise after just two games) is getting ready for its close-up. Delayed until 2001, *Gran Turismo 2000* is now *GT3*. Name has changed but the amazing game looks to be the same. We marvel at games like *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* and *Sega GT*, but nothing will compare to this juggernaut of a racing title.

GT3

Developer
Polyphony Digital

Publisher
SCEA

We still think the majority of games slated for release on the PS2 are fairly unoriginal and below expectations, but this may be an exception. A clever little title that Sony opted to let Activision release here, *Sky Odyssey* lets you fly fighter planes. No death and destruction will accompany this game, though; it is all good clean fun. Another *Pilotwings*? Maybe. At least it isn't another sequel.



Sky Odyssey

Developer
SCEI

Publisher
Activision

And then there are sequels we are drooling over. *Twisted Metal 3* and *4* just plain sucked. Without the original developers, SingleTrac, helming the projects, they were nothing more than shovelware. Well guess what? The SingleTrac guys are back with their new development house and are working on *TMB*. We've seen a movie of the gameplay running and let me tell you, it looks amazing!

Twisted Metal Black

Developer
Incognito

Publisher
SCEA

Move over Lara Croft, there's a new lady in town!
–GamePro

F.A.K.K.2 blends all the best aspects of...'Legend of Zelda', 'Jedi Knight' and 'Tomb Raider', and avoids almost all the missteps of those games. I found myself asking, "Lara who?"
–Gamecenter.com

In comparison to Tomb Raider...the lead Fakk2 character is far more versatile, ...good looking and interactive. It's got everything that Tomb Raider never had!
–Speedy 3D

This game is seriously bad news for other 3D action/adventures. I've been gentle on Tomb Raider because really, despite the lack of innovation in that series, it was still the best of its breed. Not any more.
–Gamesmania

...she'd tear Ms. Lara Croft a new one
–Gamers Depot

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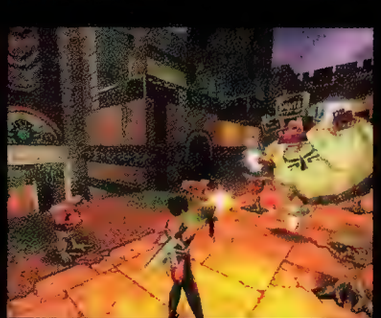

Developed By:
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GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS™

PC CD ROM

Mac

MATURE M Animated Violence Animated Blood and Gore
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Available NOW for PC and Mac

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TAKING HELL TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

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MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Animated Violence

Dreamcast™

CAPCOM
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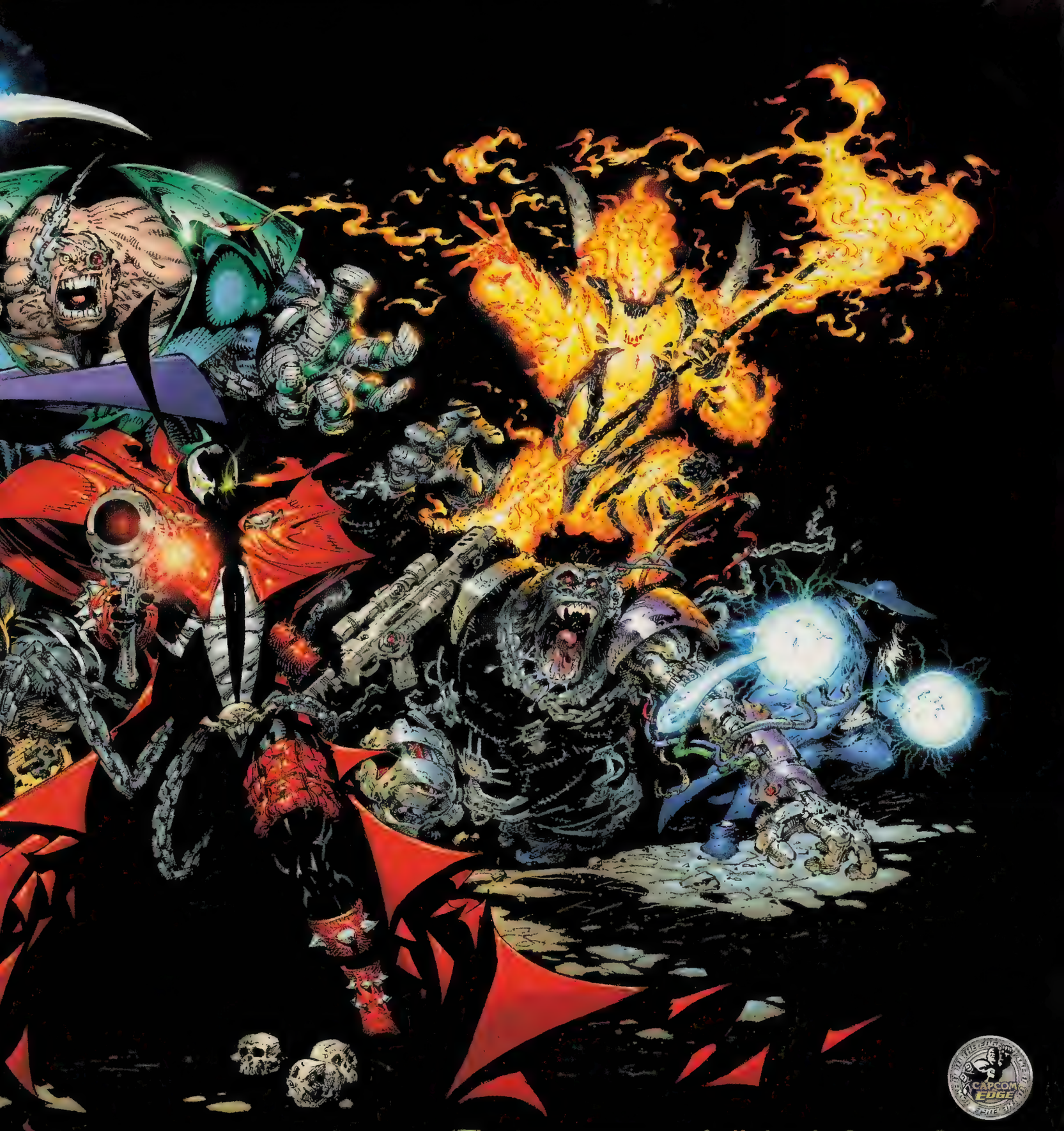
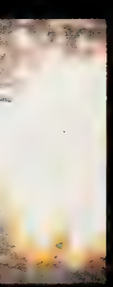
TODD McFARLANE
ENTERTAINMENT
SPAWN.COM



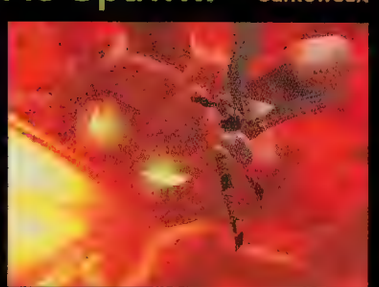
"The true essence of all that is Spawn." –Gameweek



–Todd McFarlane's blockbuster comic book characters come to life on Sega Dreamcast

–Compete in the four-player simultaneous Battle Royal mode

–Includes the original Arcade Mode and tournament style Dreamcast Mode



–All your favorite characters from the Spawn series are faithfully recreated in the ultimate death match challenge

Zelda: Majora's Mask
Ms. Pac-Man 122
Batmann Beyond 122

The Bane of Being Second Best

Ok, so maybe third or fourth best is more like it, but truth is, I don't play games to be competitive. Sure, around these parts that third grade mentality of my Transformer is bigger than your Go-Bot might rear its ugly head a tad too often, but luckily varying tastes keep the GameFan battlefield on semi-even terms. ECM's busy with his shooters, Eggo's generally tied up in the world of *Final Fantasy*, Kodomo's got his racers and umm... *Tekken*; and me, well I've got those lovely games that seem to slip through the cracks—from *Donald Duck* to *Blues Bros 2000* (yeah, I know you envy me). Every once in a while, however, we get a game in the office that appeals to a number of editors all clamoring to get first dibs. Titles like *Worms Armageddon*, *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2* and *NFL2K1* have at times transformed this quiet valley building into a bedlam-esque state. But when the much-anticipated *Zelda Ocarina of Time* appeared at the cave, it was a mad rush to see what editor could make it to Gannon's Tower first. Each day was a challenge, dodging spoilers ("Hey Fury, have you tried shooting an arrow into the sun yet?" Thanks, Kid Fan) and not looking like a complete idiot when you were at last stumped and needed help finding your way out of the water dungeon. Day in and day out, *Zelda* was on the tips of everyone's tongues, with regular conversation halted in place of the latest news and soap-opera-like musings on the world of Hyrule. And then, as I was

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
MAJORA'S MASK

at last making real progress defeating what is perhaps Miyamoto's best offering since the original *Zelda*, an announcement over the GameFan PA brought all to a sudden and most unforeseen halt. "Anyone who wants to see me beat *Zelda*, better come over to my desk." My god, ECM had done it, he was at the end of the game and I, with my middle name being "Defeat," found myself first in line for the ultimate gaming faux pas. I was about to witness the final battle and ending to the game that had been the very point of my existence for nearly two weeks... and I hadn't even fought Dark Link yet <sigh>.

Saving the Princess... err, Mask

You'd think by now, with so many quests under his belt, Link had seen it all. No enemy, dungeon, or legend could sway this brave Hyrulian. But what about the end of all existence—complete Armageddon in the land of magical fairies and dancing scarecrows? I know, it's quite a departure from the tried-and-true formula we're all familiar with but then again, this is by no means you're typical *Zelda* adventure. For starters, *Majora's Mask* wasn't the brainchild of Shigeru Miyamoto. Instead, with business at NOJ heading in the direction of a certain next gen "cube," the master game designer opted to let one of his prodigies craft Link's latest romp. And let me tell you, his vision was **very** different from that of Mr. Miyamoto's. Like in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, with different directors taking the helm for each film, *MM* carries the basic look and feel of the *Zelda* world while completing turning the surface elements on its axis. The game of course plays nearly identical to *OOT*, with the exact same control scheme but the pace and look of the game is as far removed from the *Zelda* universe as could be (probably similar to how fans felt when watching *Phantom Menace*... minus Jar Jar, naturally).

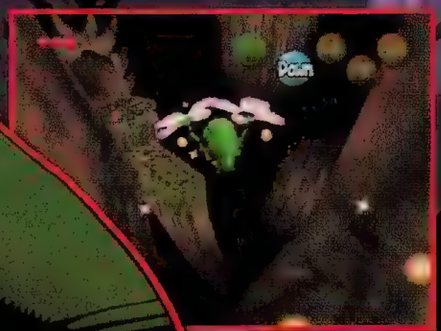
As the game starts off, Link is returning from his battles in the *OOT*, when two lone fairies suddenly spook Epona. Rearing up, Link is thrown from his trusty steed's back and knocked unconscious... but not for long. Link soon awakes to find an odd-looking child making away with both Epona and his beloved Ocarina. But who is this strange child and what's up with that bizarre mask on his face? And just why the hell is the moon (temporarily forgetting the freakish face adorning the unstable rock) about to crash into the countryside? Indeed, the first few minutes of *MM* will leave you scratching your noggin till you strike brain juice. But as the questions mount, the screen turns black with the ominous words "**Day One, 72 Hours Remain.**" Day One?! 72 hours remain?! Well, that's just great and all, but how am I expected to make sense of this convoluted story line in a mere 72 hours (Note: 72 hours according to the Zelda clock is about the equivalent to around two hours in real time). I mean it's not like the moon is going to kill everyone if I don't figure things out by the third day, right... right?!

VIEWPOINT SCORE: 98	DEVELOPER - NINTENDO	1 PLAYERS	FURY: I SUPPOSE, IN SOME WAYS, WE'RE ALL WEARING MASKS.
	PUBLISHER - NINTENDO	AVAILABLE NOW	

REVIEW

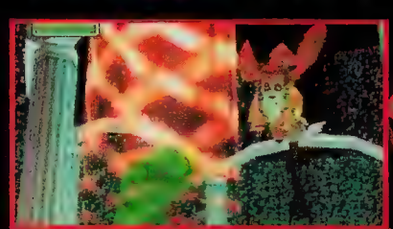
A Face Only a Mother Could Love

What, I didn't mention that you begin your quest inhabiting the body of a Deku scrub? In case you didn't play *OOT*, the Deku were creatures that would suddenly pop out of the ground and spit flying nuts at Link throughout the game. And now, you have the privilege or misfortune (depending on who you ask) of joining the Deku race. Luckily for Link's sake, his new persona is a temporary hex, but first you'll have to uncover a few mysteries and make some key alliances before you can return to your old self. Whereas *OOT* centered on acquiring different songs for Link's ocarina, *Majora's Mask* keeps players on a constant search for various masks hidden throughout the land. Each mask has a certain ability, some obvious, while others only become clear as the story line progresses. The Deku mask, for instance, which is the first mask you obtain after freeing Link from the dreaded Deku curse, allows Link to transform at will into said Deku scrub. A little trickery never hurt anyone (except Eggo, who's still patiently waiting for Leonard to give him a call back) and convincing unsuspecting Deku merchants, royal guards, etc. that you're all part of the same gene pool will become common practice. I'd like to say that Nintendo did away with prejudice in their virtual world long ago, but you just try and get the Deku guards to let you into the Deku Palace as Link... can't we all just get along?



A Travelers Tale... in the Twilight Zone

Remember how awesome it was in *OOT* traveling back and forth between Link's adulthood and childhood. Seeing the changes that affected Hyrule as you danced with father time (or in *MM* case, The Goddess of Time) was one of the coolest aspects about the game. While time travel is still prominent in *MM*, the duration of travel has now been restricted to a three-day period.



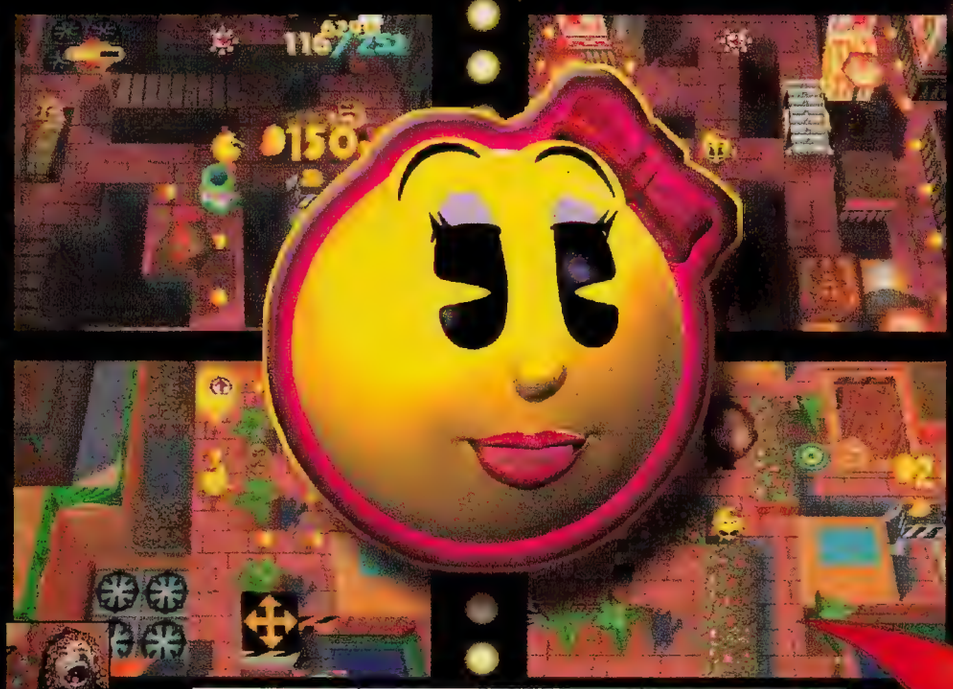
Eventually, you'll be able to warp directly to a particular day within the 72 hours to accomplish a number of tasks that are time sensitive. But beware: Though traveling forward can be done in small increments, there is no going back unless you play the Song of Time and start at the very beginning of day one, which will erase progress on certain side quests. So that means, if you've spent tons of time working on missions that can only be dealt with on the third day, and need additional time to finish them, you are, how should I say, screwed. There are ways to slow the flow of time but unfortunately, the clock is **always** ticking. <Note: using the Song of Time will also affect relationships you've made along the way. In other words, folks ain't likely to remember you, so get ready to introduce yourself once, twice, three times and on>

Expand Your Horizons

I hope you've got an extra few bucks lying around, especially after you dropped about $50 on this shiny new gold cart, 'cause *MM* is "expansion pack required." Some, of course, will find this out the hard way, when they get home and boot up their brand new *Majora's Mask* to find themselves staring at an evil black screen. Why exactly the expansion pack was so necessary in this case is still a bit of a mystery. The graphics don't appear to be any sharper than *OOT* and from what I've heard, it was utilized to help create more expansive environments with less pop up. But truthfully, whether the levels are more expansive or not, I could really care less! This is *Zelda*, folks, and this game is not about the graphics or how many polys were used on the characters (come on, we should all know what to expect on the N64 at this point), but about a great experience, plain and simple. *Zelda* transports you to another world entirely and it's one that I revel in each time I have the privilege of taking control of Link. Really, the only thing I could imagine gamers getting fed up with is the tedium involved in traveling back and forth so often. Sure, it's going to take a bit of getting used to, with the moon crashing into the land every seventy second hour and such, but so what? This is Link's world, not ours; we just play in it. Bottom line: *Majora's Mask* is not quite as epic an adventure as the *Ocarina of Time*, but the new quest is still every bit as entertaining as any Zelda game should be.

Fury's idea of an epic adventure is a two-hour lunch at Revolving Sushi.

MS. PAC-MAN
MAZE MADNESS



If you think this is the second time we've covered this game in GameFan, you'd be referring to the review we did on the PlayStation version earlier this year. A personal fave of mine, *Maze Madness* on the PlayStation was a breath of fresh air in a stagnating gaming landscape. All of the action/adventure games and racing titles were beginning to wear a bit thin.

Needed was a 3D version of the classic pellet muncher, complete with a story to propel the game along. *Ms. Pac Man Maze Madness*' appearance on the Nintendo 64 is as welcome as it was on the PlayStation.

For those of you that missed my gushing over the PSX version, here is a quick rundown of what to expect: Based upon the gameplay of the original, *Maze Madness* is part adventure, part platformer and part puzzle. Each of the boards, which are very well designed, comes complete with pellets to gobble, fruit to find and problems to solve. Like many platformers, the game keeps a running tally of things like score, time, and items collected. When you get 100% on any level, you unlock extra stuff to give the game a boost in the replayability department.

If you want to know more about the game, check out the September issue; this version is exactly the same with better graphics. I may be the only one in the industry that is ecstatic over the eminent release of the Dreamcast version. Hey, I'm a simple man with simple pleasures... and *Ms. Pac Man* doesn't get much simplistic.]

PREVIEW	JUDGE: BALLS TO THE WALL.	DEVELOPER - MASS MEDIA	1-4 PLAYERS
		PUBLISHER - NAMCO	AVAILABLE 4TH QTR

BATMAN BEYOND

Well people, you can chalk this up as another perfectly cool license flushed straight down the toilet. One of the hippest and visually stylish cartoons has been bastardized on the PlayStation and N64.

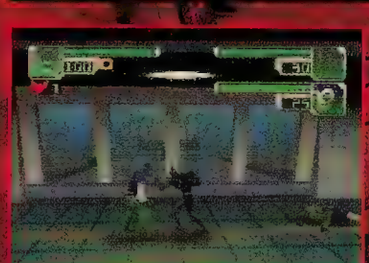
A 3D beat-'em up, *Batman Beyond* manages to set the genre back a decade with its stiff control, sub-par graphics and poor level design. Not only that, but the combat mechanics are more limited than Fury's vocabulary, making each fight as painfully repetitive as the one before it.

In an attempt to add a bit of variety, you can choose from 5 different Bat Suits, each designed to specialize in a different area. There is the offensive suit for more power, a defensive one to help with deflecting blows, and an agility suit for better maneuvering, to name a few. The option to be able to change suits to better navigate each level is a good one, but the limited control makes the variation far less noticeable than it should be.

You also have access to several different weapons, like your Dark Knight Discus, which you can power up, and your nunchucks. They do break up the monotony of the punch-kick combo, but have no real oomph.

One of the disappointing aspects is the graphics. At a time when texture mapping and lighting effects are really coming along, *Batman Beyond* looks like a first generation N64 title. Silly shadows, flat shading and low poly models make the game look like it is still in alpha stage as opposed to being about to hit the shelves.

Batman Beyond is just another example of a good game gone bad. Fans of the show and those with limited skills will most likely get some short-term entertainment out of it, but this game is to be avoided by everyone else.



The Judge thinks if Batman had some Spidey Sense, he would have known to avoid this project.

REVIEW	JUDGE: BEYOND WHAT: REPAIR?	DEVELOPER - KEMCO	1 PLAYER	VIEWPOINT SCORE: 61
		PUBLISHER - UBI SOFT	AVAILABLE NOV	

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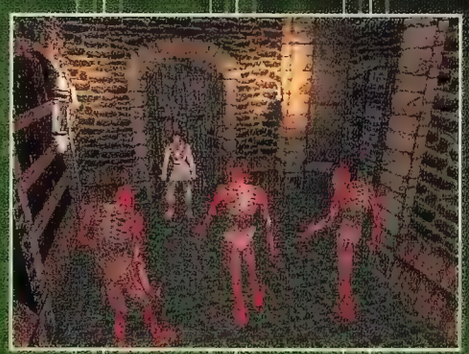
COMING SOON

They keep delaying it but in this case, that is a good thing. *Eternal Darkness* is one of the most promising titles ever for the Nintendo 64 and if Silicon Knights need a little more time to make it perfect, then they should get a little more time! When it is ready, I want the ultimate experience, casting my more than 100 spells and maintaining my Sanity Meter as to remain stable. Survival Horror, indeed.



Eternal Darkness

Developer
Silicon Knights

Publisher
Nintendo

Another game that seems like it is constantly being delayed is *Aidyn Chronicles*. An epic RPG, *Aidyn Chronicles* will let you control 13 adventurers—up to 4 at a time—in your quest. Tons of cool monsters, spells and weapons are there to be enjoyed. Expect a release sometime in early 2001... or expect more delays. Either way, expect something...

Aidyn Chronicles

Developer
H_2O

Publisher
THQ

The last thing the world needs is another wrestling game, but as long as you readers continue to eat them up, companies will still make them and we will still have to review them. This isn't your garden variety WCW match. This time, you take the fight backstage! Bum-rush your unsuspecting foe in the inhospitable cement lots behind the ring, where there are no rules and more blunt objects.

WCW Backstage Assault

Developer
Kodiak Interactive

Publisher
EA

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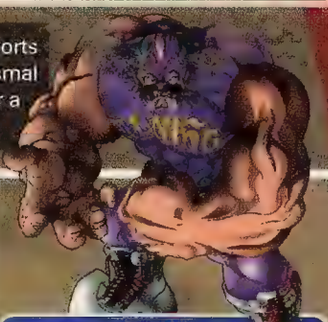
GameFan Sports

Yeah, yeah, I know. The section is getting smaller. The Man is trying to keep me down, giving me almost no space. Apparently they think just fat, pasty-skinned nerds read GameFan and that they have no interest in sports titles. Oh well, less work for me, right? Besides, it freed up more time for me to play Eggo in *NFL 2K1* and KidFan in *NHL 2001*. I think right about now is a good time for me to thank Sports Illustrated for cursing the Red Sox (again) with a World Series cover. Another year, another heartbreak.

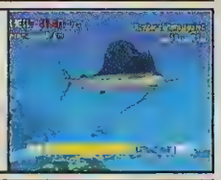
It's that time of year again: EA Sports time. Just about every game is from the sports behemoth. While they are all good games, one cannot help but wish they'd go away. The PlayStation's days have passed and I want nothing less than a total concentration of EA's efforts on their PS2 stuff. *Madden 2001* and *NHL 2001* are fantastic PS2 titles and I expect *NBA Live* to hit the mark as well. Sega Sports has made some blunders, as of late, with the dismal *WSB* and the hockey no-show, so the only place for a sports fan to turn will be to them. ***El Niño***



This game is great! I encourage you to get yourself a fishing controller and kick back in the La-Z-Boy for some salt water fishing. You can snag marlin, sharks and even rays. Keep an eye out for the sea turtles though, don't want to get one of them by accident.

G 9 C 8 P 9 M 7 O 7 — **89**

Sega Marine Fishing
Dreamcast
Sega Sports



I generally avoid fishing games, not 'cause they're bad—'cause they suck me in and I end up mesmerized for hours! This game, though, is faster paced, fun to play, and graphically the best fishing title yet. But I wonder if Barnes & Barnes will like it?

G 9 C 9 P 9 M 7 O 8 — **93**

Ok, there is fast and then there is too fast. You will need to keep the speed down on this game to make it playable, but after that, prepare yourself for a great playing hockey game (and it has user records too). The 2-man booth is still the best there is.

G 8 C 8 P 7 M 7 O 6 — **85**

NHL 2001
PlayStation
EA Sports

I give this good scores because it remains a quality hockey title, satisfying my on-ice urges. It is hard recommending a game like this though, because it offers little to the veteran player in way of competition or features. With the PS2 version here, I will never play this game again.

G 8 C 8 P 8 M 8 O 5 — **86**

Another solid installment in the long running franchise but let's hang it up people. The PS2 version is on its way, as is Sega's *NBA2K1* so let's just move on. If you need your updated roster fix, though, you will not be disappointed with the game.

G 7 C 8 P 8 M 5 O 5 — **84**

NBA Live 2001
PlayStation
EA Sports

I still get excited when I pull off a sweet dunk (this year it is my gravity-defying Vince Carter special that I do ad nauseum) but when I stand back and take a look at the whole package, all it really is, is an updated roster. The commentary just blows.

G 8 C 9 P 9 M 4 O 7 — **94**

Just what the doctor ordered. While this game can be classified as "awesome," someone should be slapped for forgetting user records. How is it that a feature that has been in every EA Sports title since 1993 doesn't show up in a PS2 game? Lame, lame...

G 9 C 9 P 9 M 9 O 6 — **93**

NHL 2001
PlayStation 2
EA Sports

Well, well, well... Barring some slight (make that ultra-slight) frame skipping, this is the fastest hockey game on the planet. Capturing the classic EA hockey gameplay and with graphics that are to die for, you must buy this game at all costs. Go Detroit!

G 9 C 8 P 9 M 9 O 6 — **92**

Sega Marine Fishing

Review

Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

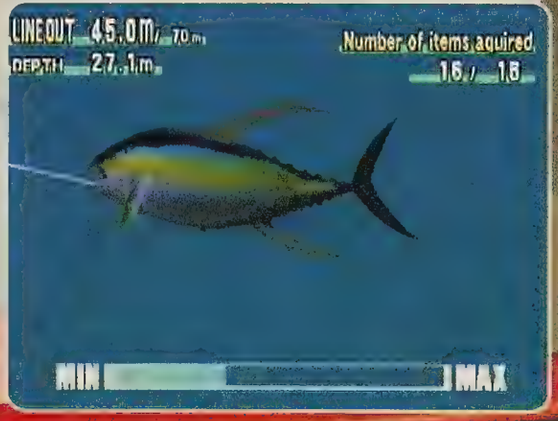
Available: Now
# of Players: 1

Yeah, I admit it; I like fishing games. I also think most of them are sub-par. In fact, I would go so far as to say that few, if any, have matched the SNES *Super Black Bass*. *Sega Bass Fishing* was a beautiful arcade game but the "arcade" part annoyed me to no end. Fishing was not meant to be timed. *Sega Marine Fishing* is another timed game, but the "Original" option, included for the Dreamcast, gives it so much more life and ends up making it my favorite fishing title to date.

A Naomi arcade game (*Bass Fishing* was Model 3), *Marine Fishing* was a better looking but equally tight playing title as *Bass Fishing*. All of the components that made *Bass Fishing* exciting are in here, as well. The large number of unlockable extras keep you playing. Earn new lures, line and clothes as well as different stuff to decorate your aquarium. The aquarium is where you get to store all of your tropical fish you catch (land a mako shark for your tank!).

There are a couple dozen different fish to catch and 3 different areas to fish in. Tuna, barracuda and stingray are just a few of the fish you can land, and all of them are modeled beautifully. To add to the realism, each fish behaves in a different manner, which forces you to stay on your toes when reeling them in (the sailfish is a real pain).

Sega Marine Fishing is a step above *Sega Bass Fishing* and is a must for fans of the sport. Everyone else should also take a look at it because you needn't be a fan of fishing to appreciate the fun of this game. **EN**



LINE OUT 0.0m
DEPTH 0.0m
Number of items aquired
16 / 18
Jerk the rod and make splashes to lure the fish.
Most effective when aiming for a big fishes.

NHL 2001

Developer: EA Canada **Available:** Now
Publisher: EA Sports **# of Players:** 1-8

Review

This is it kids, so pay attention. Sega has canned *NHL 2K1* for whatever reason and EA's "most favored nation" status with Sony has probably nuked any chance of seeing a *FaceOff* any time soon, so this is the only game in town. If you are looking for 128-bit hockey, the PS2 is the only place you will find it and EA is your sole provider.

Thank the gaming gods that *NHL 2001* lives up to its reputation... and more importantly, the expectations of the hardware. The Coolest Game on Earth shines on the PS2.

FaceOff 2000 was my choice for hockey game of 1999 because of its speed and arcade control. In an attempt to match this, *NHL 2001* on the PlayStation kicked up the speed and was actually too fast! I was worried that the PS2 version might have also been stuck in fast forward. Actually, the PS2 version, in default mode, is painfully slow. Once you crank that slide bar up, though, the game gets to a speed that you can be comfortable with: quick enough to keep you on your toes, but not so fast as to make it look silly.

Control, too, is excellent. Solid passing, deking and skating make the game as realistic as it can be without sacrificing gameplay. The one annoying area: the slapshot. I have seen water boil faster than that wind-up. Stick to one-timers and wrist shots (the puck still sails around 90mph).

The graphics are simply amazing, if not totally eerie. They really look like the players! To see Chris Chelios or Joseph Stumpel in close up is to see their doppelgangers. Creepy. Eyes blink, idle players fidget and bodies fly when you put a big hit on.

There isn't enough space here to really talk about all that *NHL 2001* is, so let me just run through some of the high points and disappointments. Great 2-man booth commentary, stat tracking and attention to detail; major thumbs down for no user records (yup, you heard me right. What idiot forgot to put those in?). Good managerial options, international as well as NHL teams and a momentum meter. A truly terrible manual line change interface; probably designed by the same guy that forgot the user records. The fighting still sucks, but at least there is a chance to earn a reward for winning. Plenty of options to customize teams and create players... but oversights on small details like whether some players are left-handed or right-handed.

This game definitely has its flaws. It is clear that they were forced to hustle it out the door in time for launch but the damage is minimal. The overall product is just plain fantastic. This is a must buy when you get your system come October 26th. **EN**

ECTS Riot's Top 5 (or 6)

1 .....Wipeout Fusion
2 .....Time Splitters
3 .....Mario Kart Advance
4 (tie) .....NHL 2001
4 (tie) .....Madden 2001
5 .....Black and White

EUROPA

European Consumer Trade Show aka ECTS 2000

The scene

The convergence between wireless communications and games was palpable at this years ECTS show held September 3-5 in London. With larger publishers like Electronic Arts, Activision, Infogrames and Eidos deciding not to have presence at the show floor, it was left to countless multimedia and wireless comm developers to strut their stuff. While there were plenty of games and hardware to sample at the show, the small amount of developers and publishers present was a disappointment.

The entire back section of the Olympia exhibition hall has usually been taken up by Sony but despite the upcoming PlayStation 2 launch the company had a more low-key approach this year with the games (instead of massive video-walls) taking center stage. In one hall, PSOne games like *C12* and *Driver 2* were demonstrated while an adjacent (and extremely hot) area was home to PlayStation 2 titles of which hardly any were developed by SCEE itself. Behind closed doors it was a different story with *Wipeout Fusion*, *Dropship*, *Gran Turismo 2000* and *Spin* being demonstrated.

Each one of these managed to make a strong impact, visually speaking at least. The much-talked-about *Getaway* was nowhere to be seen but team members from the Soho studio that are currently developing the title were confident that a late 2001 release was realistic. The title combines *Metropolis Street Racer* style realism with massive areas of London accurately modeled and textured. The ambitious design calls for a very open-ended environment with the player being able to get out of his car and walk into buildings and battle thugs with a Z-Lock style mechanism. The game's design is ambitious to say the least and hopefully at E3 next year, we'll get a chance to play it.

nGame and Orange were just a few of the companies demonstrating WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) games. Developers like Rage and Elixir have signed with WAP developer start-ups to help produce content. At this point, nobody's really been able to produce a killer-app that would make mobile phone owners rush out and download a game but with so many big-name developers working on projects, it is more a question of time than anything else. Interestingly, almost every company rep I spoke to did conclude that WAP is a middle-phase and the next-generation technologies like GPRS and UMTS will be a lot more powerful than the current technology. This isn't stopping companies from embracing WAP however.

Both Electronic Arts and Sega held their own press events around the show with Sega renting out the Empire theatre located at Leicester Square. Sonic and characters from *Soul Calibur* pranced around before a 45-minute Sega movie started. At first, Sega Europe's staff talked at length about the imminent online gaming service provided for the Dreamcast but many of the crowd had already heard these promises last year which lessened the impact. After the lengthy talky bits came the real highlights, the games. *Metropolis Street Racer* got tremendous cheers as the cars in the demo passed London's central meeting point Trafalgar Square. Other highlights included *Daytona USA*, *Half-Life* and a finished European version of *Shen Mue*. EA's beautiful HQ at Chertsey was the location of their press reception, where Bruce McMillan went through the fall line-up, which includes quite a few excellent games especially on the PC.

Having revealed the Gamecube and Game Boy Advance to the world just a week before ECTS in a special press event in Tokyo, Nintendo repeated its show a day before ECTS at London's legendary Playhouse theatre. Both Shigeru Miyamoto from NCL and Jim Merrick from NOA were present, and demonstrated the Gamecube and Gameboy Advance respectively. At the actual show floor, Nintendo had massive presence and Nintendo 64 and (more so) Gameboy Advance took center stage. Anyone you'd talk to would mention that their favorite game at the show was *Mario Kart Advance* and I too rated this game highly... but more about that later.

Konami is heavily upgrading its operations in Europe and their massive stand at the show was evidence of this. Promises of a playable version of *ZOE* made me run to the Konami stand at first chance but sadly the game was only shown in video form as was *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. New footage of both games was demonstrated and the crowd was just as mesmerized as they were at E3. Both *Ring of Red* and *Shadows of Memories* were playable and well-received, especially the latter, with its time-travelling aspect being very interesting. The main character, Eike Kusch, dies in the beginning of the game, gets resurrected and must find out why and by whom. Many of the game's locations featured very sharp textures as the facial animation of the 6000+ poly characters was superb. As for the gameplay itself, the game felt very much the same as your average *RE* clone but since this is coming from the man who produced *Silent Hill*, my hopes are high. Incidentally, Konami almost showed *Silent Hill 2* at ECTS but decided not to at the very last minute. The game is to be unveiled at the Fall Tokyo Game Show.

Xbox was nowhere yet it was on everyone's lips and the support is definitely there for Microsoft's machine, with the Dreamcast looking to be in very bad shape when it comes to 3rd party developers. Sega's got plenty of in-house productions coming in 2001 but I cannot name one third party developer working on a second quarter 2001 Dreamcast title. Microsoft announced its first party developers which included Lionhead's Satellite Studios and Climax Studios.

A disappointment was the lack of any PS2 titles at Codemasters stand but confirmation was given on a PS2 version of *Music 2000* and *Colin McRae*. Show attendance was up once again and ECTS is finally changing venues—from next year the show will be held in a brand new location. We'll be back.

Wipeout Fusion

Mine and Kodomo's most highly-anticipated PlayStation 2 game and, after initial fears of the series deviating too much from the hardcore path, I'm happy to say that is not the case. Designers Republic has been dumped in favor of Good Technology who will provide the Flash-like visual design. The game is about 75% complete and, according to lead programmer Stu Sockett, work has been progressing just fine on the PS2 with effects and the weather system yet to be added. Instead of tracks, *WF* has environments, which change during the course of the race. AI pilots will also have grudges against other players, which will be evident in the races where the pilots will try to kill each other off. On track for a March 2001 European release, *Wipeout Fusion* looked awesome but sadly, we didn't get to play it just yet.

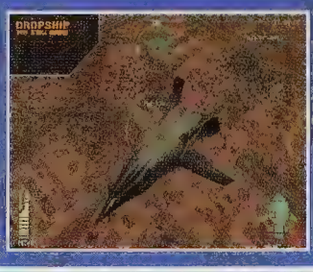
Time Splitters

Each new version of Free Radical Designs debut game gets me more and more excited about it and the version playable at ECTS was no different. The single-player aspect hasn't been given nearly as much development time as the multi-player aspects as FRD scrambles to finish *Time Splitters* in time for the PlayStation 2 launch. I had my initial fears about the game's visuals but those are just great at 60fps—however, the controls are difficult to get used to.

Sky Odyssey

Running on a single machine hidden away at SCEE's stand, *Sky Odyssey* is a very *Pilotwings*-esque flying game. SCEE gave out zero information about this game and no screenshots were available. Visually, Sky Odyssey was stunning and, based on a quick spin, the game's pretty fun, to boot, with many different crafts available to try out.

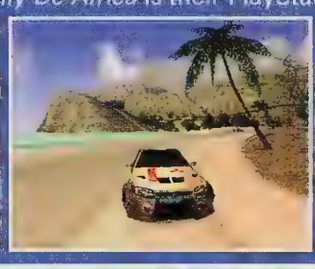
Dropship
40x40 kilometer highly-detailed landscapes with no pop-up, no bitmap backgrounds, just polygons and about 250,000 fractal generated trees per area, SCEE's Camden Studios first PS2 game had the numbers but encouragingly the 30 minute demonstration given by the developers was extremely promising. The graphics had journos mouth-watering but the gameplay mixing RTS elements with more arcade-like approach was promising as well. Besides getting to fly massive dropships and employing troops, the player can use ground vehicles like tanks and jeeps to take out enemies in many different missions which range from surveillance and escort tasks to all out attacks.



Gran Turismo 2000
Kazunori Yamauchi was on hand to demonstrate the latest build of his ever-improving racer complete with a racing wheel controller that will be available when the game ships in early 2001. Most of the improvements have been made to the graphics as the physics engine is finished. Car models are fully textured and the backgrounds are far better looking than in the E3 demo. There will be only around 150 different cars as compared to GT2's 400+ which is simply due to the fact that modeling a car for the PS2 version takes weeks instead of days.

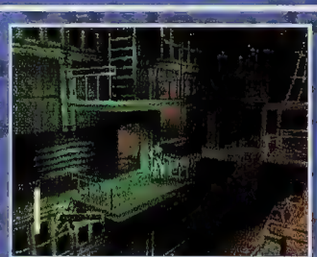
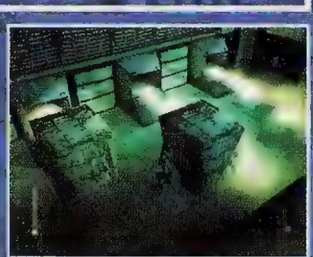
Unreal Tournament
Epic's superb PC game is hitting both the PS2 and DC, but only the PS2 version was available at ECTS and you only got play it if you got into Rage's private suite (since Rage represents the *Unreal* engine in Europe). A lot of work has gone into the game since E3 and the framerate is now much better as are the character models. I didn't get a chance to try out the networked version... but according to Infogrames the launch date is November 29.

Rally De Africa
Rage's got quite a few racing games coming up and *Rally De Africa* is their PlayStation 2 specific racer coming out sometime in 2001.



Moto GP
Namco's seriously upgraded arcade conversion of GP 500 was playable on a few kiosks and while the tracks are extremely accurate to their real-life counterparts, the controls were unforgiving and the sense of speed just wasn't there.

C12
A lot of hype surrounded *C12* prior to ECTS and I was eager to find out what SCEE's Cambridge Studios (creators of the excellent *Medievil* games) were up to. *C12* was playable on a few PSOne units; the game is a third-person shooter that mixes elements of *Syphon Filter* and *Expendable* (but in a good way I hasten to add!). The graphics were top-notch, the designers got the post-nuclear-war-grey-holocaust look down pat and the action flowed smoothly... a very cool blaster that's coming out in March 2001.

Nintendo
Pretty much all of the games Nintendo had on the show like *Zelda: Majora's Mask* and *Mario Tennis* are nothing new to US gamers, but the company's large stand for the Game Boy Advance was much-appreciated by pretty much all in attendance.

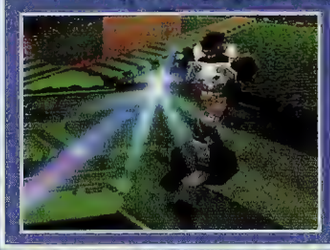
Mario Kart Advance
Still in a very early state, the GBA version of *Mario Kart* managed to generate long queues, as everyone was eager to try out the much-loved game's new version. Konami's GBA racer paled next to *Mario Kart Advance* which looked just as good as the SNES version. The controls were a far from optimal but man, this game will be reason enough alone to grab a GBA.

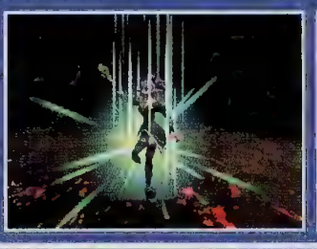
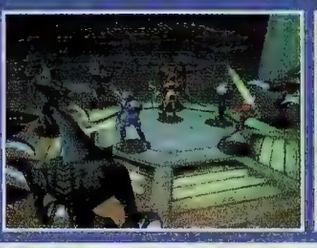
Banjo-Tooie
A game that is probably going to re-write the book on large levels has slipped to a 2001 release but, judging by the demo present at ECTS, work is close to being finished. The animation of the bumbling duo is a sight to behold but it's clear that, in terms of playability, Rare is not going to break new ground here.

Sega

Phantasy Star Online

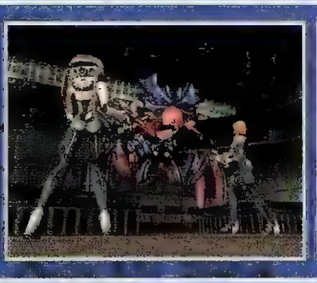
Awesome...and confirmed to be released this year in Japan. PSO looked gobsmackingly great and for the first time the translation system which will enable players from different countries to talk with each other was shown working. English text was being translated into Japanese and vice versa, most likely the system is based on key-words which is a good idea since in the heat of the battle you hardly will have time to hammer out long sentences.

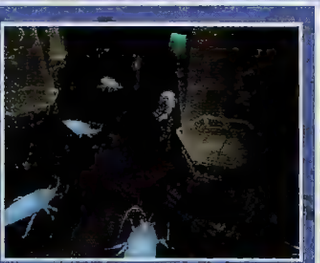


Gun Valkyrie

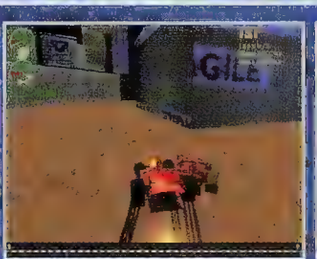
SmileBit's next game was surprisingly shown by Sega. Featuring very stylish graphics, very little information was given about the game. Heavily-anime inspired, the mech-battler will be mission based and contain full online support, in Japan at least.





Toy Racer

No Cliché's racing game is using many of the same characters as its under-rated first Dreamcast game, *Toy Commander*. *Toy Racer* features similarly colorful graphics and racing in unconventional areas like ceilings and such (a bit reminiscent of Codemasters' *Micro Machines* series). No Cliché's David Chomard was on hand at Sega's press party to demonstrate the multiplayer aspects of the game. Having just managed to include the online support in this ECTS build, Chomard said he was surprised at how well the network mode ran via modems. After quite a few frantic sessions with the game, I'd have to agree... now Sega just has to get people to try these games.



Agartha

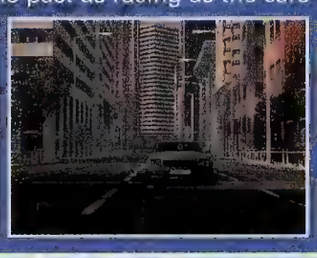
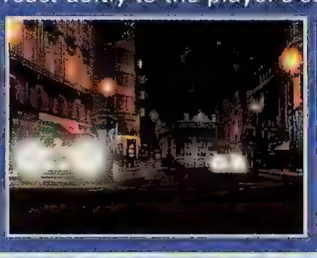
No Cliché's long-in development gothic horror game, Agartha is penciled in for release before the summer of 2001. No live footage of the game shown but some of the screenshots convey a very dark Alone in the Dark approach. Interestingly, a selection of camera styles will be offered, from static to the handheld style of the Blair Witch Project.

Daytona USA : Network Racing

The biggest surprise! About five seconds of footage from Daytona USA : Network Racer was shown by Sega and I can only say, FINALLY! Imagine playing the perfect version of Yu Suzuki's seminal Daytona at home online with others...racing don't get much better than that. Zero details were given out but the release date is sometime in the beginning of 2001.

Metropolis Street Racer

Still coming...having re-written the engine and changed the design concept a bit, Bizarre Creations still highly anticipated racer should hit the stores in Europe during October. A new demo distributed by SOE at their event is brilliantly addictive. The graphics still pack a punch and the horrible E3 controls are in the past as racing as the cars react deftly to the player's commands.

The parti... er, press events. No tradeshow would be complete without the obligatory drinking sessions masked as "informative press events." EA's "Show b4 show" offered a Black and White demonstration and too few PS2 units to play games on. The food and beer was flowing but yours truly left before anyone got drunk enough to go swim in the small lake in front of EA's HQ. Nintendo's event resembled a real press event the most with its informal style but CTW's and Fox's excellent No One Lives Forever party was just that. Sega's thing came up trumps in the bad organizing department, after the 45 movie was over, we were ushered out and told there's no press reception. On my way out another colleague claimed that a reception was indeed happening and after going through security to the back of the theatre, there indeed was an reception...most of the foreign media however had no idea such an event was taking place and left. It was up to Sony to spend gazillions at their most-excellent party which featured a set from Jamiroquai who proceeded to play a selection of brand new tracks from his new album coming out sometime next year...everyone who was someone was present at the party and hours were spent beating the opposition in foosball.

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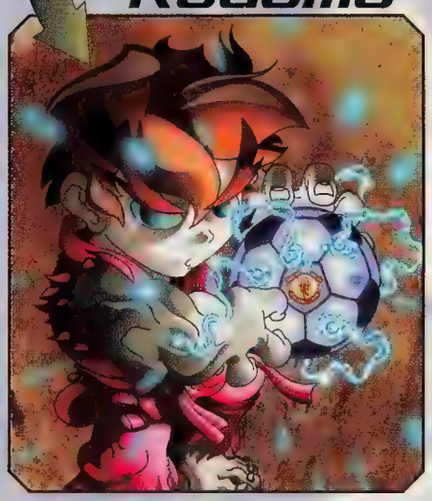
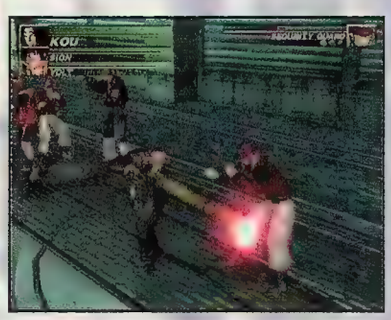
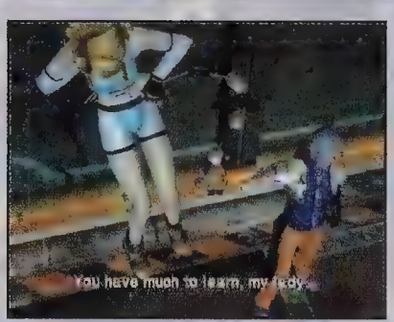


The Bouncer

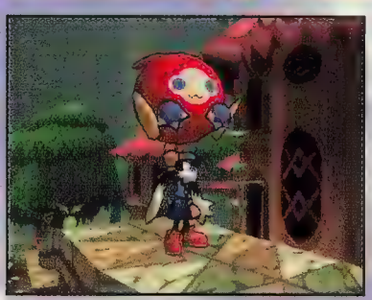
Finally, the first in game shots of *The Bouncer* have surfaced (though an exact release date is still tantamount to classified information), and give a detailed view of something that's now going down the beat-'em-up route. After its video-only debut at the Fall '99 Tokyo Game Show, the game has been delayed quite a bit (missing a planned playable public unveiling at 2000 E3), but is now nearing completion. Only one question remains about this Square Dream Factory collaboration: Will it be on par with the amazing *Tobal 2*, or more akin to the forgettable *Ehrgeiz*?

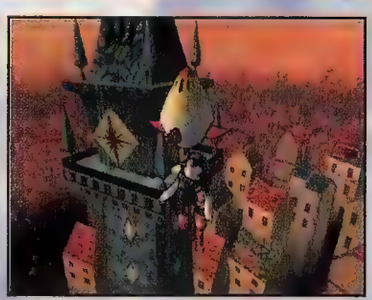


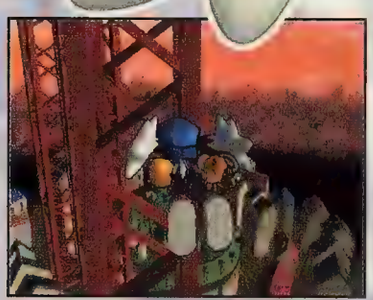


Klonoa 2

Wow! Were we surprised when Namco announced that its next foray into the PS2 market would be the return of *Klonoa*. Tentatively titled *Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil*, it's only 40% done and sports the coolest new trend in gaming, Cel Shading. Namco is promising that the game will retain the same 2D platforming action and control of the original, with a better camera and upwards of 24 levels. Look for the game to hit Japan early next year.





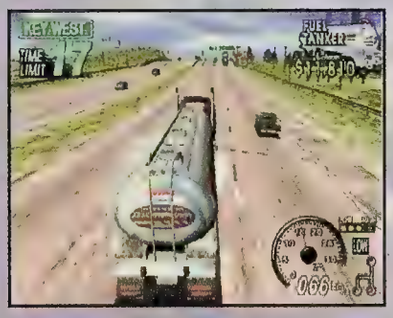


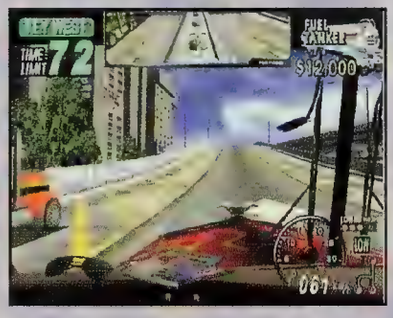
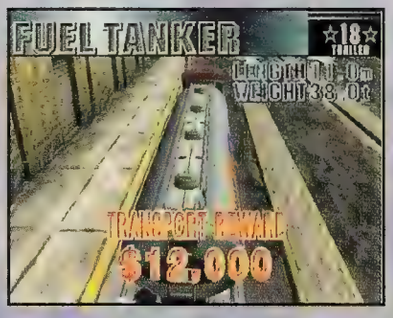
Illbleed

While Climax's previous Dreamcast games have been the relatively tame *Climax Landers* (dubbed *Time Stalkers* in the States) and *Blue Stinger*, *Illbleed* is set to push the company's kill quota over the edge. I'm thinking the game should be called "I'll bleed", due to the generous portion of the red stuff at every turn. Get kicked (or blugeoned, batted or slashed) by the legions of the living dead that populate the amusement park in the game, and you'll bleed profusely. The game itself is a mixture of *Blue Stinger* and *Resident Evil* with more than a few fright-filled moments in our preview version. Unfortuantely, the game hasn't been announced for Amercian release (it would probably kill Senator Leiberman by sheer shock value alone), so don't hold your breath for anything but the Japanese version.

18 Wheeler American Pro Trucker

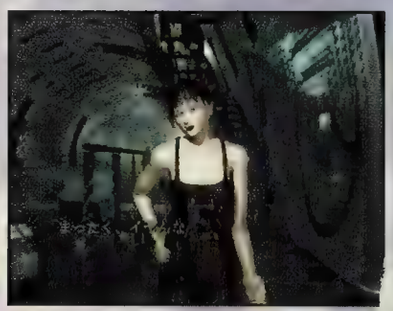
Sega's latest Naomi to Dreamcast conversion continues the line of 'real life' games started by *Harley Davidson* and *Tokyo Bus Driver*, but takes it a step further. Following in the lofty shoes of such memorable truckers as the Snowman and BJ (from *BJ and the Bear*, of course), you'll have to haul cargo across various American interstates. While the game is mainly based on time (with bonuses hidden on each freeway), you'll lose money from your cargo haul if you take too much damage. Look for a full review next month.

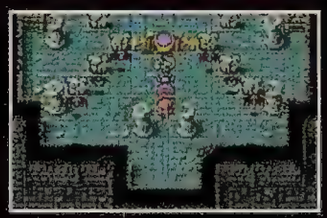


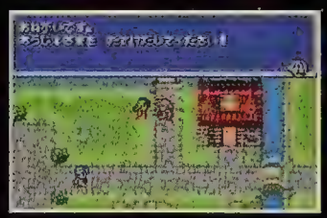



Desperia

Following the success of *Maken X*, Atlus is taking a much simpler route for their next DC game. *Desperia* is more graphic adventure (think dating sim without the fruitiness) and much less action oriented than you might think. If the that notion of limited gameplay wasn't enough to kill any chance of importation, the storyline rife with chemical abuse and ultra-violence just might. Still, we'll take a deeper look at *Desperia* very soon.







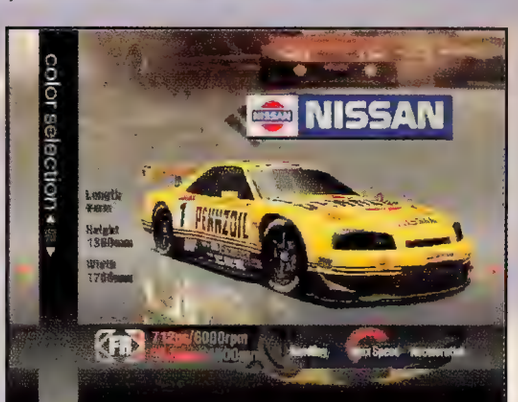
Final Fantasy (WS)

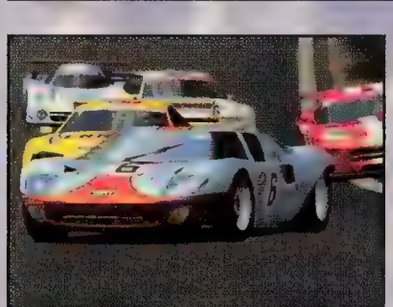
If you're the type of gamer who just can't live without *Final Fantasy* (read: Eggo), December will be a historic month. At that time, Square will release a graphically upgraded version of *Final Fantasy* (which will eventually be followed by *FF II* and *FF III*) for the brand new WonderSwan Color. Here are a few pics of the new WS and what *FF* will look like running on it.

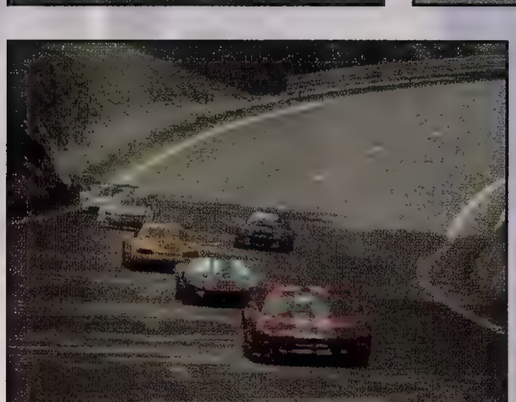
Color WonderSwan

Gran Turismo 3: A Spec

As you've no doubt noticed, *Gran Turismo 2000* has undergone a name change to *Gran Turismo 3: A Spec* and is now on course to ship sometime early next year. The delays are due to several reasons, not the least of which is the massive increase in polygons per car extending rendering time from days to weeks each. The one thing that we haven't been able to confirm at this time, is that Sony is allegedly making the game networkable. Whether that's going to be the simple ability to link units or something more, we just don't know. At the very least, you'll get 150 cars (down from 400+ in *GT2*) to use in road and rally races within the next 6 months.







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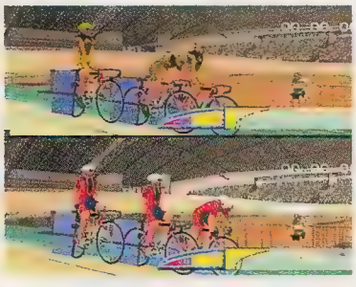

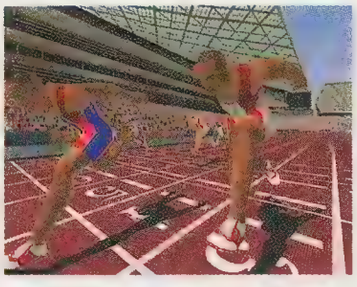

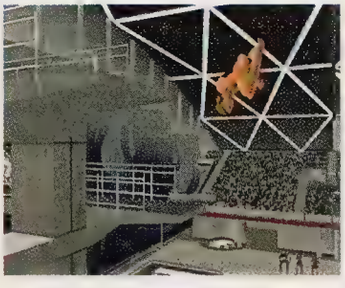

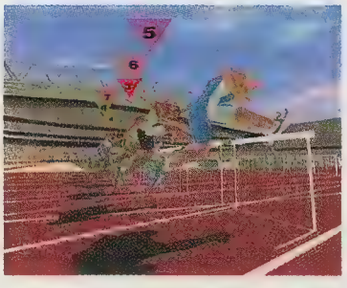

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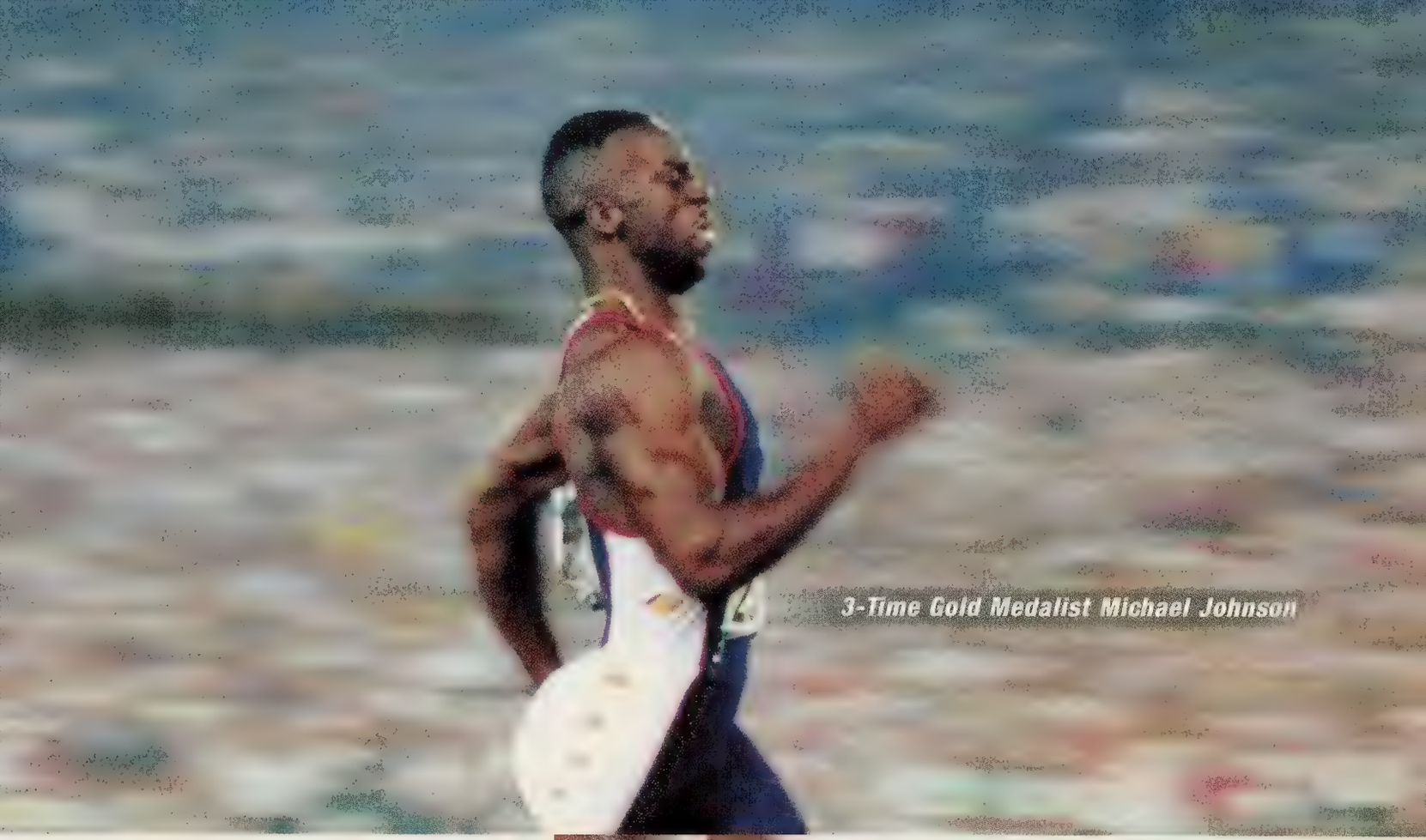

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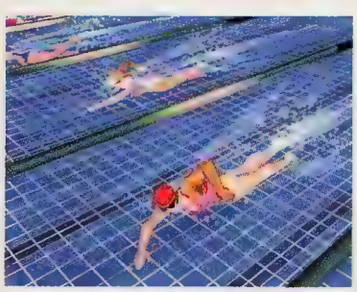

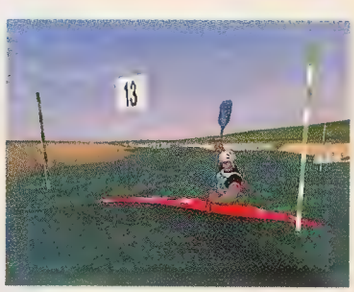

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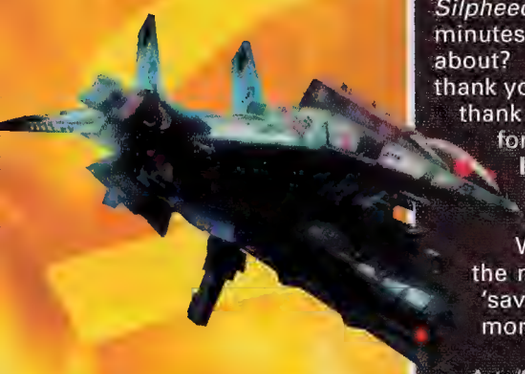
Imports

Reviews

Silpheed ➤ 138

G-Saviour



THE Silpheed

"All is not lost! Treasure is on the PS2 case! There will be a reason to buy a console come Oct. 26th—I'm the happiest man alive! Man, I can't wait to see what Treasure does with the console, and with a *Silpheed* license (!) of all things. Yep, after getting over the recent shock announcement of their new NAOMI shooter *Ikaruga* (by the *Radiant Silvergun* team—it must be my year!), now I'm getting a sequel to *Silpheed* on a console, up until 15 minutes ago, I couldn't care less about? Thank you Treasure, thank you Game Arts, and yes, thank you Working Designs for having the stones to bring it over **on launch**. Hey wait... what's this... no, no, this is no good... what's this? Why is it so easy... I'm on level 5 for God's sake. What's happening here?! **THIS** is the best the mighty Treasure can muster? This is the 'savior' I'd been waiting for...?! Grah, it's more like *Silpheed: The Lost Hope*..."

—ECM, after playing Treasure/Game Arts/Capcom's *Silpheed: The Lost Planet*

I wish I could tell you it gets better with subsequent plays; I really do. I wish I could tell you that it makes up for all the bottom-of-the-barrel fare, import PS2 owners have had to deal with. I wish I could tell you that, yes, there is indeed a game for the faithful to get worked up over...but there's not.

Now I'm sure there are a lot of fans of the Sega CD rev of *Silpheed*: I myself, was totally enthralled with its eye candy joys for, oh, about a week. After demoing it to friend upon friend (mainly to convince them of the unbridled power of the Sega CD: "You don't see this on Super Nintendo, now do you? Well, do you?!"), it soon lost its appeal. And while I have fond memories of it, I don't think anyone out there is still trying to fool themselves as to its merits as a game... except for maybe Fury—"But dood, it's so sweet... look at those backgrounds, bra. It's even better than my new wheel locks... Gameplay? Oh, yeah, that's cool too... m

But no, the game wasn't much to write hom about (or anywhere else for that matter)—unfortunately this carries over to its younger sibling in spades.

Now that we're so jaded, after having games like *Ferrari F355* foisted on us on a seemingly regular basis, what are admittedly pretty decent visuals (though I'm not sure about the seemingly very limited palette) just don't cut it anymore. And with the graphics excised from the equation, you're left with *Silpheed*-style gameplay... and as I mentioned above this is **not** a good thing.

Before I do get into the meat of the 'gameplay,' let me just go over the in-game graphics real quickly: Once again, the game **does** look good—only problem is that the color palette is particularly weak (there simply isn't a wide enough range in hues for it to be truly satisfying). The actual backgrounds are quite nice to gaze upon, but there's nothing in here nearly as spectacular as the space battle sequence from the Sega CD rev, which is still one of gaming's 'greatest moments' (coming soon to an issue of GameFan near you). The boss sequences are pretty nice, but more than one will elicit a firm feeling of déjà vu ("Hey, I saw that in *Radiant Silvergun*!"... too bad it was much better there).

The problem with *Silpheed* is that it's a shooter, and if shmups need one thing it's an intensity level that makes you break into a sickly, heart-rocketing, sweat by the 3rd or 4th level—you need to be working as if your life depended on it to progress (though the competition seems to think that as long as you have unlimited continues, a real challenge is utterly unnecessary). If it lacks intensity, you'll cruise through it in no time, and never pick it up again. *Sometimes*, however, you can get away with it—or a lack of it.

Silpheed
Lost Planet

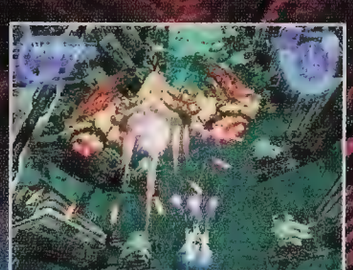
In these **very** rare cases, a clever power-up scheme and some creative play mechanics can make up for a severe lack of challenge—I call this the '3D Platformer Effect.' Unfortunately, not only is *Silpheed* completely devoid of challenge (there are continues, but even the SAG editors at other mags won't need that life raft this time), but it's also almost completely devoid of gameplay—and without gameplay, this game will get one play through and be relegated to the shelf to serve as a dust storage device till it's traded in at the local game store.

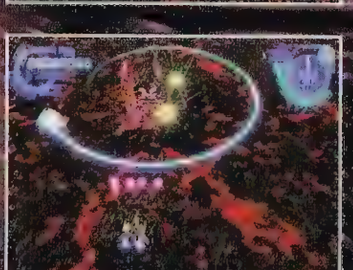
OK, so there's a score multiplier system, where you rack up additional points by destroying encroaching enemy craft and fire power—the closer you're 'in their face' the more points you'll get (up to a 16x bonus). This will unlock weapon upgrades much more quickly (which you can swap mid or between levels... but **can't** power up). Now, if you code a game that is completely lacking in intensity, do you really need to add the ability to remove enemy shrapnel from the screen? Sure, in a game like *Giga Wing* or *Gunbird 2*, where the gameplay is orders of magnitude more intense, it's a nice bonus... but not in a game where stray bullets are as frequent as willing women at a gaming convention.

The CG is surprisingly good, but isn't in the league of *Gradius III & IV* (the **only** redeeming quality of that game). The CG is, naturally, produced by Game Arts, but the other startling fact is that GA did the 3D engine as well, leaving Treasure to handle artwork and design. I hate to say it, but this is easily among Treasure's lowest points, riding the pine with games like *Light Crusader* and *Silhouette Mirage* (it's not that good... no really, it isn't).

When it comes right down to it, the PS2 is not shaping up to be a shmup fan's first choice. While the DC only has two greats in the form of *Gunbird 2* and *Cannon Spike*, that's two phenomenal games versus two god-awful games—and with the pretty decent *Mars Matrix* coming soon, things are looking rather dreary for PS2 gamers in this dept. But hey, there's bound to be a couple of hundred racing games to fill that void...<bleargh>.

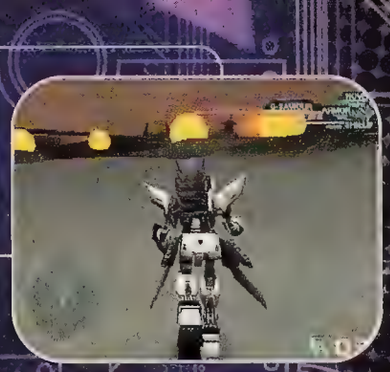
The only thing ECM loves more than a good shooter is defending the shooter genre via loud tirades through the GF offices—but he's been strangely silent since this game arrived.





Silpheed (in case you didn't know) was one of the most heralded of the Sega CD games. Originating in rather shabby form on Japanese PCs (and later in America via Sierra), it was later ported to Sega's disc spinner with some spectacular-looking spooled polygonal backdrops. The gameplay itself was relatively, well, weak, but most overlooked this simply because you had to unbolt your jaw from the floor just about every other second of the game. In a sick, twisted sort of way, it's the kind of game you now see, oh, every 10-15 seconds...

Viewpoint Score: 58	Developer - Treasure/Game Arts	1 Player	ECM: Shooters: The Lost Hope
	Publisher - Capcom	Available Now	



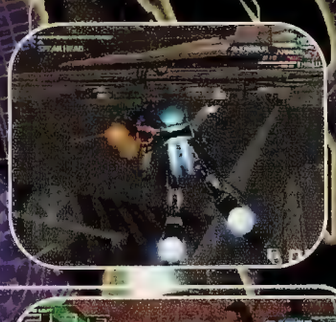
With the US launch of PS2 behind us, and a serious dearth of anything even approximating a compelling game due for release over the next 6 months on our shores, I am now forced to turn my eyes to the Far East, in hopes that some compelling import titles are in the near-future. What's this I see? A new *Gundam* game? On PS2? Sure, it may be the 3rd giant robot game available on the fledgling console (setting some sort of record, I'm sure), but if there's one thing I love about Japanese culture (besides sushi and Sapporo) it's big robots—and *Gundam* is the granddaddy of 'em all.

Sadly, *Gundam* hasn't exactly had the most, how shall I say, spectacular showing in console entertainment—in point of fact, 95% of the *Gundam*-based games are tripe. Out side of the marginal *Gundam Gaiden* games (including the recent DC release in a roundabout way), it's with low expectations that I go into any game that includes *Gundam* characters (outside of the *Super Robot Wars* games). However, with a new console comes the unfortunate effect of an increase in optimism: "maybe this time they'll get it right... it's the PS2 for god's sake—it has to at least look good, right? Right?!" How soon we forget...

Simply put, *G-Saviour* (sic) is as generic, boring and lackluster as the rest of the series. How does jetting around bland, uninspired landscapes, sniping targets at long range, occasionally blocking a stray enemy bullet and fighting off unconsciousness at every turn sound? Fun? Didn't think so.

G-SAVIOUR

Gセイバー

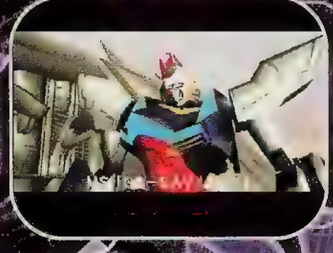


That's the key problem: The game doesn't feature anything akin to an intensity level above water aerobics for seniors. You'll tool around some sizable environs blasting the snot out of the brain dead (I've seen better AI in the original *Pong*) enemy mechs, all the while marveling at the bland textures and blasé character models. In fact, outside of your own mech, the game is visually mind-numbing to gaze upon for extended sessions ('extended' being 10 minutes, tops). This is a snooze-fest of epic proportions.

Not only are the graphics completely nodescript, there's a decided lack of sense of scale involved; whereas in *Armored Core 2*, and, more impressively, in Gun Griffon Blaze, you actually *feel* like you're motoring around in a multi-story, mega-ton mech. Not so in *GS*—it's more like playing a 3D platformer than a giant robot game.

The best part of all of this? The first boss doesn't even bother shooting back!!! That's right, simply step back, sedately tap the 'x' button and he'll be down in no time flat—this, after a big speech (in English, surprisingly) where he informs you in no uncertain terms that you're his bitch—kinda reminds me of the Judge talkin' trash about how his Patriots were going to beat my Jets this year.

Needless to say, this is yet **another** lackluster, monotonous, painful PS2 outing. It doesn't help that there are already two, far superior, mech games already stomping around on the same console.



ECM will be Gundammed if he has to play another one of these games anytime soon.

REVIEW				
ECM: Yes, another Gundam game... <retch>	Developer - Sunrise	1 Player	Viewpoint Score: 55
	Publisher - Sunrise	Available Now Japan	

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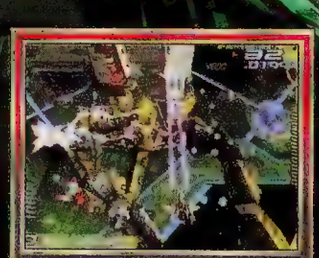

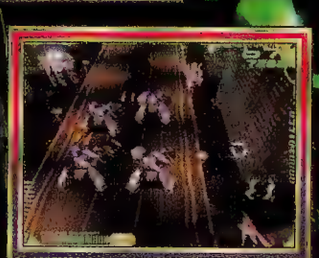

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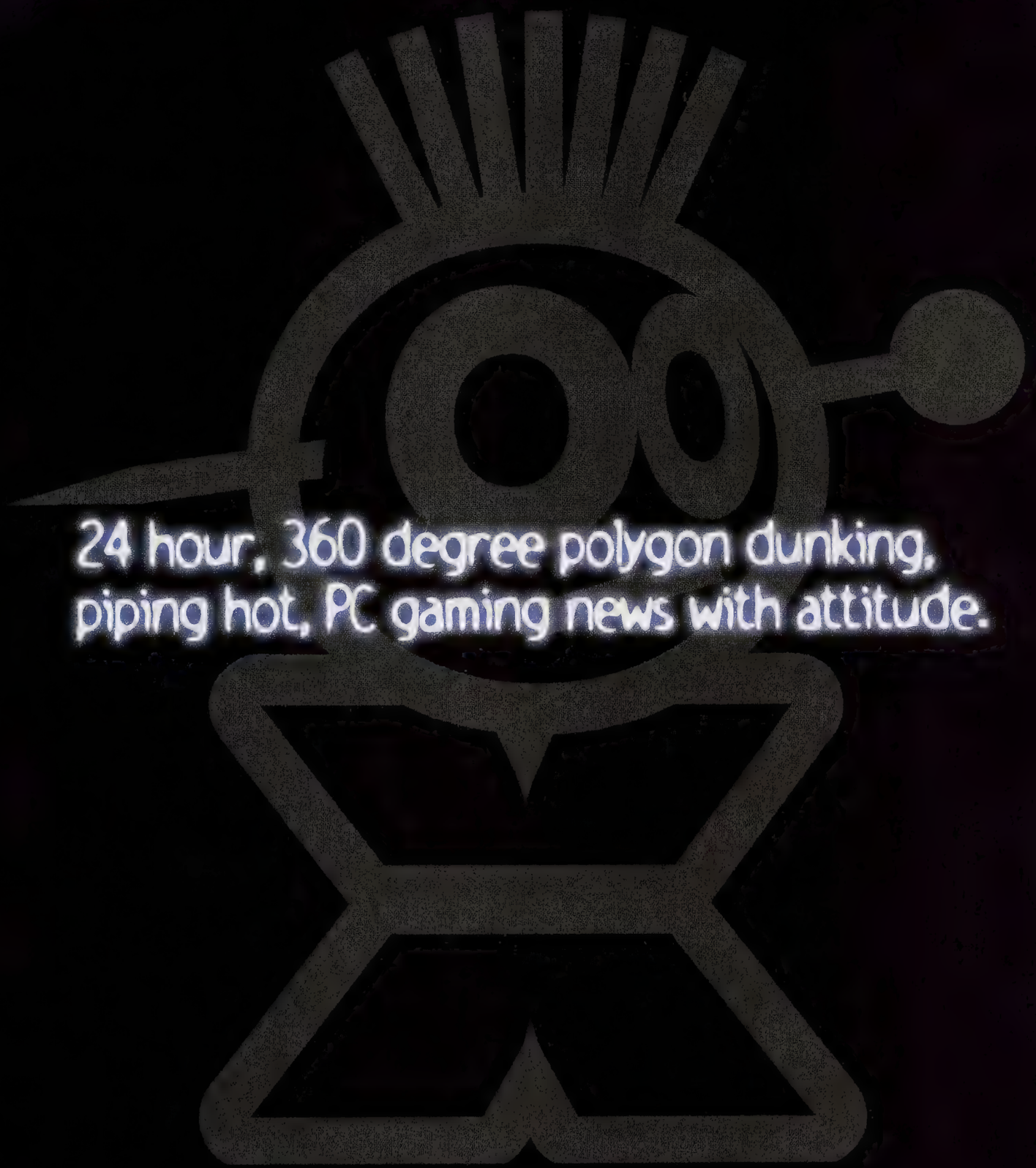

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3 Eligibility: Promotion is open to U.S. residents only. Return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Winners may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within 7 days of receipt or forfeit prize. If winner is a minor, then prize will be awarded to minor's parent or legal guardian. By acceptance of a prize, winners agree to allow Company to use their names and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Employees of company, its parent and affiliated companies and their families are not eligible. Neither Company nor its affiliates, subsidiaries, division or related companies are responsible for any damages, taxes, or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this sweepstakes or receipt of a prize.

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Graveyard

This month we have two games from opposite ends of the notoriety/infamy spectrum: Prikura Daisakusen and Tobal 2.

PD is perhaps the most obscure of the really great Saturn imports—if you have this game, you're as hardcore as they come.

As for Tobal 2, well, if you haven't heard of that, it's time for you to really question why you read gaming mags at all.

Oh, and by way of a quick little tale on Tobal 2, a prominent US publisher wanted to bring T2 here BUT Square wouldn't license it... no, we don't know why.

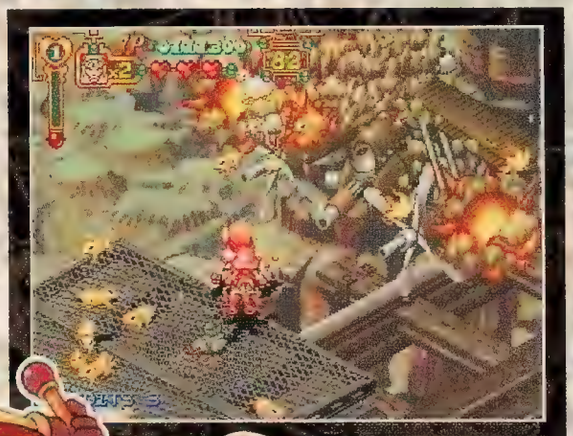
So, enough exposition and on with the games...

プリクラ プリンセス クララ 大作戦

PRIKURA DAISAKUSEN

Land of the Lost

We've all heard of the 'lost' Saturn titles: games that we always lusted over in magazines but maybe didn't have enough cash back in the day to buy (most of which made the above list, and most of which I have now paid dearly for... good thing little brothers fetch a healthy sum on the black market). Games that are now routinely fetching an eye-popping $80+ on eBay (used, mind you), with a few exceeding the $100 barrier with frightening regularity. Ah, but there's one game that virtually no one's ever heard of—a game that began life as an ST-V (Saturn arcade hardware based a la *VF Remix* and *Die Hard Arcade*) title: Atlus' *Prikura Daisakusen*.



Why hasn't anybody heard of this graphically intense, super-cute, insulin-shock-inducing 'shooter' before? Good quesion, and something I don't have a ready answer for. Even GameFan, the staunchest supporter of weird imports (still trying to get the taste of *Super Hero Retsduen* out of my mouth... blecch) failed to take note of this wonderful little game, and so off it went, floating in a sea of complete and utter obscurity... until now.

PETA Power

Did I mention that this game has a sugar-sweet coating that would make even Reubus' hellish sweet tooth blanche (the boy puts TEN packets of sugar in his already sweetened iced tea... I need to make a dentist appointment just thinking about it... <gag>). The goal of *PD* is to destroy an onslaught of mechanized montrosities out to rob the world of cuteness—or so it would seem if you didn't bother paying much attention to the story... which I didn't, naturally.

Stop me if you've heard this before: A gaggle of cute woodland creatures has been kidnapped by some evil entity and encased in destructive suits of armor, replete with guns, knives and all sorts of implements of destruction to take over the world and generally wreak much

havoc. Your job, should you choose to accept it, is to take control of either Princess Kurara or one of her two pals and head out to destroy this army of furious fauna, all the while breaking open their body armor and rescuing them from a fate worse than death. Sound familiar? It had better...

Easter Time Already?

Like pastel colors? Think every day should be Easter? Think pink shirts for men should have stayed in fashion past 1989? Then *PD*'s graphics are for you (and Shidoshi)! You've never seen a game go on such a pastel overload—everything is colored like an Easter egg, and beautifully so. The detail level is staggering, with each and every sprite colored to perfection. Simply gaze at the screens littered about this page and sigh, think of another time when 2D ruled the world, and try not to cry... <sob>. Sorry...

However, what you can't see from these still pics—and what makes *PD* so stunning to see—is the animation! The old adage "It looks like an animated cartoon" fits like a glove on *PD*'s slinky little frame. Princess Kurara and her companions are expertly animated from their idle animations up to their super-charged, over-the-top 'bomb' attacks—as is everything, from the lowliest forest critter (wait till you see the possums!) to the bosses themselves—particularly level two and three. You'll asphyxiate on the blazing color and unearthly animation. One of the best looking Saturn titles of all time? Let's just say that even the Capcom ports would be hard-pressed to keep up...

One Girl Against the World

PD is an action shooter... or at least that's the closest category I can come up with that the game fits into. In fact, perhaps the best way to describe the game to someone that hasn't played it, is Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* in arcades, with smaller, more compact levels. You'll travel through 6 beautifully-realized levels, in an isometric perspective, utilizing 'laser' attacks and close-range, hand-to-hand moves to liberate the legion of wildlife from their unholy captor. It starts out *very* easy, but by the time you hit the level two boss, things get a lot more interesting. From there on out, it starts to less resemble a kid's game (which is what it looks like upon initial perusal—don't let your friends catch you playing this... you'll **never** hear the end of it) and more a hardcore action game. As a brief aside, I find it stupifying that Atlus' *Princess Crown* (a great game, but virtually unplayable without a decent knowledge of Japanese) got more 'props' than this one—somebody was definitely asleep at the wheel on this one.

There's No Place Like... eBay?!

Yep, cause that's about the only place you're likely to find one these days. I'd also recommend www.videogamedepot.com (as always) and if you're **very** lucky, www.ncsx.com had a few copies the last time I looked. Get them now, cause as soon as word gets out that this game is a. very rare, and b. really, really bloody good, you can bet the price on eBay is going to skyrocket up and beyond the 'magical' $80+ barrier. Would it still be worth it then? What do you think? **ECM**

GRAVEYARD • GRAVEYARD • GRAVEYARD •

"...the single best PlayStation game of all time..."

TOBAL 2

"True genius is rarely appreciated in its time."

How very true that is. Look back through history and you'll see that the path to glory is very often a posthumous reward, bestowed only after years of critical and commercial scorn. The sad fact is that most everyone in the world is ready to jump up and down and praise the mediocre for taking something old and making it 'new again' (Dean Devlin and Rolland Emmerich's films, for instance), rather than recognizing unique excellence. Reinventing the wheel is not an easy thing to do, but how much greater is that feat when its accomplished by a company with zero expertise in the area?

"...Tobal 2 puts forth more advancements and refinements than should be legal in any one game."

In a word: stunning, amazing, deep, flawless, incomparable. Okay, that's 5 words, but when you've got the collective might of Square (and further, the sub-set DreamFactory) creating a fighting game that takes an already great game and improves it vastly in *every single aspect*, a little bit of exaggeration is not only acceptable, it's necessary.

From *Tobal* came *Tobal 2*, and the single best PlayStation game of all time. You can keep your cries for *Final Fantasy* (any of the last 3 will suffice) and *Metal Gear Solid*, because those are not games. They are experiences. Yes, for the most part, they are exquisitely done, but, after you've gone through from start to end one time, you're left with a 60-dollar *experience*. An interactive movie that you watch a few times, play even less, then put on the shelf. The second visit to the *Tobal* tournament is quite the opposite, a daily player that justifies, even needs, to be in the PS constantly.

That's the main problem, though, as a game that is designed to thoroughly be played, doesn't quite fit into any fighting series. Think *Tekken*, with fully 3D movement rather than a simple up/down axis shift. Think *Virtua Fighter*'s deceptively base control system with guard button, then add the most involved throwing system of any game. Think *Street Fighter II*'s combos with mind-numbing timing requirements, but with a penalty for sitting back and using projectiles. Think all that... and more.

GRAVEYARD : GRAVEYARD : GRAVEYARD :

Dreamcast [DC]

- Bio Hazard 3 Last Escape [Import]
- Eldorado Gate [Import]
- Guilty Gear X [Import]
- Gun Spike [Import]
- Eternal Arcadia [Import]
- Shenmue
- Metropolis Street Racer
- NFL 2K1
- Capcom Vs. SNK
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Nintendo 64

- Dance Dance Revolution Featuring Disney Dancing Museum [Import]
- Rockman DASH [Import]
- Mario Party 3 [Import]
- Custom Robo V2 [Import]
- Furai No Sylen 2 [Import]
- Pokemon Puzzle League
- Ogre Battle 64: Person of Lordly Caliber N64
- Ready 2 Rumble -Round 2
- The World is Not Enough
- WWF No Mercy

PlayStation [PSX]

- Khamrai [Import]
- Dance Dance Revolution Disney's Rave [Import]
- Patlabor Game Edition [Import]
- Square Millenium Collection
- Legend of Mana [Import]
- Rockman X5 [Import]
- Parasite Eve 2
- Carmageddon 2
- Persona 2 Eternal Punishment
- WWF Smackdown 2
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Game Boy Color

- Dance Dance Revolution GB 2 [Import]
- Beatmania GB Gottamix 2 [Import]
- Rockman X Cyber Mission
- Pokemon De Panepon [Import]
- Dragon Warrior I & II
- Madden NFL 2001
- Ultimate Fighting Championship
- Powerpuff Girls Episode 1: Bad Mojo Jojo
- X-Men Mutant Wars
- Harvest Moon 2

PlayStation 2 [PS2]

- Sunrise Eiyuutan R [Import]
- Cool Boarders Code Alien [Import]
- Dream Audition 2 [Import]
- Dog of Bay [Import]
- UNISON [Import]
- Bloody Roar
- Carrier
- Galleon
- Dark Angel 2
- ESPN MLS Game Night

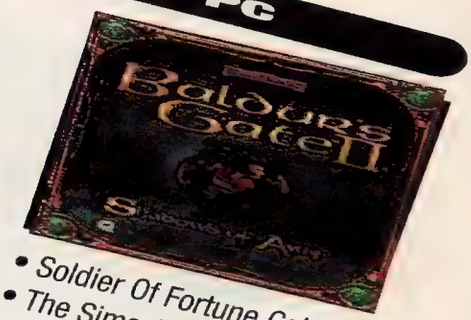
Game Music

- Dance Dance Revolution 3rdMIX Original Soundtrack [Import]
- Dragon Quest 7 Original Soundtrack [Import]
- Dance Summit 2001 Bust a Move Original Soundtrack [Import]
- Ridge Racer Type V Official CD with DVD [Import]
- Beat Mania IIDX 3rd Style Original Soundtrack [Import]

Figures

- Final Fantasy IX Series 4 Set: Amarant and Eiko Action Figure [Import]
- Front Mission 3 Kyojun Action Figure
- Final Fantasy 8 Guardian Force 3 - Forbidden Action Figure
- Beast Wars C-28 Santon Action Figure [Import]
- Digimon 3pc Set Agumon/Greymon/Metal Greymon [Import]

PC



- Soldier Of Fortune Gold Edition
- The Sims: Livin' Large Expansion Pack
- Roller Coaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes Expansion
- Age Of Empires 2: The Conquerors Expansion
- Star Trek: Voyager: Elite Force
- Rainbow 6: Covert Ops Essentials
- Giants: Citizen Kabuto
- Evil Dead: Hail To The King
- Quake 3 Arena Mission Pack
- Tribes 2

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GAME CAVE

Dreamcast [DC]

COMING SOON

- Anna's Quest [Import] **01/15/01**
- Daytona USA DC [Import] **02/10/01**
- Eldorado Gate 2 [Import] **12/22/00**
- Hundred Swords [Import] **01/12/01**
- Macross M3 [Import] **02/15/00**
- The Mummy **12/21/00**
- Cannon Spike [Import] **01/01/01**
- Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator **01/02/01**
- Armada 2 **12/10/00**
- Gunbird 2 **01/01/01**

Nintendo 64

COMING SOON

- Aka To Kuro [Import] **01/15/01**
- Fire Emblem 64 [Import] **01/20/01**
- TOON PANIC [Import] **01/20/01**
- 64 WARS [Import] **02/10/01**
- Rev Limit [Import] **01/25/01**
- Conker's Bad Fur Day **12/04/00**
- Donald Duck **12/15/00**
- Paper Mario **12/27/00**
- Eternal Darkness **02/15/01**
- Dinosaur Planet **01/15/01**

PlayStation [PSX]

COMING SOON

- Emblem Saga [Import] **12/22/00**
- Panzer Front bis. [Import] **12/20/00**
- You're Under Arrest [Import] **12/15/00**
- Bomberman Land [Import] **12/15/00**
- Paka Paka Passion Special **12/27/00**
- Rayman 2: Back to School **12/15/00**
- The Road to El Dorado **12/15/00**
- Supercross 2001 **12/20/00**
- Lion King 2 **12/02/00**
- Blade Arts **11/30/00**

Game Boy Color

COMING SOON

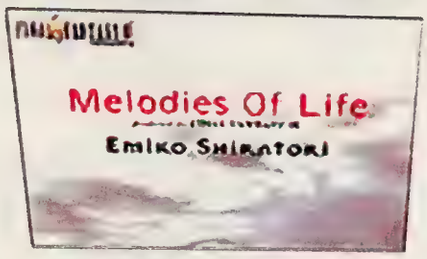
- Pokemon Crystal [Import] **12/14/00**
- Dragon Quest III [Import] **02/20/01**
- The Legend Of Zelda: Mysterious Fruit [Import] **02/15/01**
- Pokemon Attack [Import] **01/15/01**
- Pokemon Picross [Import] **03/15/01**
- Kirby Tilt 'N' Tumble [Import] **12/05/00**
- Scooby-Doo Classic Creep Capers **12/05/00**
- Ronaldo V-Soc **02/16/01**
- Xena **12/**
- V.I.P. **03/1**

PlayStation 2 [PS2]

COMING SOON

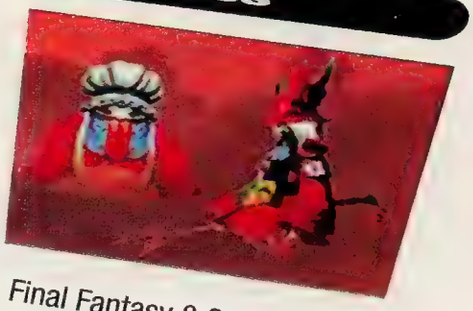
- (1/4) [Import] **1/12/01**
- 7 (Seven) **12/28/00**
- Blood the Last Vampire [Import] **01/25/01**
- Drummania 2 [Import] **12/20/00**
- Z.O.E. [Import] **01/21/01**
- Gran Turismo 2000 **01/15/01**
- Gunslinger **01/03/01**
- NBA Live 2001 **01/16/01**
- Oni **01/02/01**
- Rayman Tribe **03/01/01**

Game Music



- Keyboardmania II Consumer 1 New Songs [Import]
- Khamrai Original Soundtrack [Import]
- Persona 2 Symphonic Best [Import]
- Star Ocean Second Story Fantasy Space Mix [Import]
- Velvet File Original Soundtrack [Import]

Figures



- Final Fantasy 8 Guardian Force 3 - Iron Giant Action Figure
- Dragonball Z Full Action Kit #03 Action Figure [Import]
- Beast Wars Metals C-46 Depth Charge Action Figure [Import]
- Ghost in the Shell Major Kusanagi Hard Disc Action Figure [Import]
- Micro man Transformer Magnet Powers Metallic Special Set Action Figures [Import]

PC

COMING SOON

- *Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood Of Arms* **04/29/01**
- *Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura* **01/29/01**
- *Oni* **01/30/01**
- *Legends Of Might & Magic* **01/30/01**
- *Comanche 4* **01/16/01**
- *Silent Hunter 2* **12/01/00**
- *EverQuest: The Scars of Velious* **12/04/00**
- *Age Of Sail 2* **01/15/01**
- *Insane* **11/21/00**
- *Peacemakers* **12/01/00**

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GAME CAVE

AnimeFan

ANIME.MANGA.J-MUSIC.ASIAN LIVE ACTION.OTAKU CULTURE

Sometimes I know what to write here... and sometimes I don't. This month, I've having a bit of trouble thinking of something to talk about, as I'm trying to stay off of the topic of life and how we humans don't know what we have until it is gone. So, instead, I'll pass on a few quick observations. ***Furi Kuri*** - when is this coming to the US? ***Capcom vs. SNK*** - I like the game, but the omission of some important characters and the fact that EVERY SNK character was stripped of moves really rubs me the wrong way. ***Video Girl Ai*** manga - why is it so good, and why does Viz make me wait a month between each tiny portion of the story? ***Unreal Tournament*** - the Translocator should be permanently banned from CTF. And, of course, Silent Hill 2 - I want this game SOOOOOOOOOO bad. Greatest game ever, my prediction.

shidoshi@gamefan.com

ANIMEFAN | SPECIAL | FEATURE STORY

Anime on the Internet - Websites You Need to Visit

The internet is a big place - so once you get on it, where exactly do you go? Well, besides AnimeFan Online (of course), there are a variety of great anime and manga websites out there for you to enjoy. To help ease your search, I give you six sites I think all fans should know about. ***- shidoshi***

Anipike

www.anipike.com

If you're looking for anything anime or manga, you go here. Simple as that. Think of ***Anipike*** (Anime Web Turnpike) as the ***Yahoo*** of the anime and manga world. If you can't find it on here, then maybe it isn't worth finding in the first place.

Cosplay Links Page

www.nyx.net/~wsantoso/cosplay.html

A great collection of links to all things Cosplay. If you want more information on Cosplay, this is a good place to start.

Nausicaa.Net

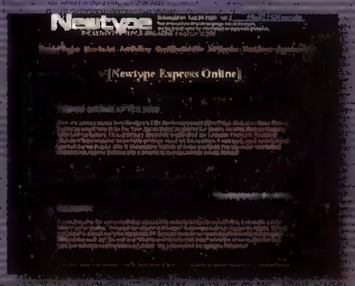
www.nausicaa.net

THE best darn unofficial Hayao Miyazaki website to ever exist. Up to date news and detailed information on every project to come from Miyazaki-sama, or Studio Ghibli in general. Any person who calls themselves an anime fan should worship Miyazaki, and anyone who worships Miyazaki should be going to this website. 'Nuff said.

Anime Terms Page

www.yale.edu/anime/glossary.html

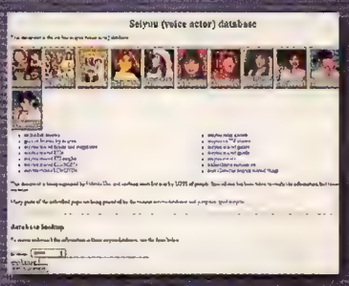
Wondering what that word or term that is used in reference to anime or manga means? If so, this is one place that you should check. With a long glossary list, this is a great resource for new and old fans alike. However, they are missing some key words in my opinion.



Newtype Online English

www.newtype-net.com

Japanese magazine ***Newtype*** is arguably the best anime publication ever created. Now, us non-Japanese speaking fans can join in on the fun. While no where near as extensive as the Japanese ***Newtype*** website, still a wonderful new site to enjoy.



Seiyuu Database

www.tcp.com/~doi/seiyuu/seiyuu.html

Want to impress your anime-loving friends by dropping some knowledge, like who played the voice of Belldandy or which popular voice actress is also an award-winning J-pop singer and voiced a popular video game? The ***Seiyuu*** (voice actor) ***Database*** is just the place to go. A huge and extensive resource giving you any and all information you could ever want about the voice acting scene and the people who make it up. Really great website.

$15.96 • Sci-fi • CPM Manga
10+ • 188 pages • US Format

Nadesico - Book 1

Kia Asamiya presents to us another of his manga creations - ***Nadesico***, the story of a spacecraft by the same name and the crew which pilots it. For those of you out there who are big fans of the anime, now you have the chance to pick up the manga and see for yourself the genesis of the series that went on to be so popular. And, if you are indeed a fan of the anime, fear not - the manga and the anime are quite different in a variety of ways. In fact, I was surprised to find that almost everything in the anime was different from the manga, save one point: Akito still ends up piloting an Aesti Valis to detract the enemy while the Nadesico originally launches. Beyond that, there's little connection. For the most, I was happy with this, because it presented something new and different, something I hadn't seen before when it comes to ***Nadesico***. Often, when an anime is based exactly off of the manga, if you've seen one, you might not have the patience to sit through the other already knowing what is going on. In cases like this, though, you can enjoy both and find something new. The only problem with this is that the manga version commits a major crime. A certain character - who I won't name here - dies early in the anime. A certain loveable, hilarious character who was completely wasted with such a short role. Well, if you thought that character had little screen time in the anime, the manga actually kills this person off MUCH sooner. What a crime!! Trying my best to forget that oh so tragic flaw, the ***Nadesico*** we are presented here feels more serious, more of a sci-fi story than a sci-fi spoof when compared to the anime. There is still humor, but it is often more subtle and low-key. Mix it all in with typical Asamiya artwork and characters, and you end up with a quality product. Certainly not my favorite manga currently out there, ***Nadesico*** is still a good read, especially for fans of the show who want to experience the characters and mythos of ***Nadesico*** beyond the TV series. - ***shidoshi***

GPH NVL **B** good

Minna no Mail - Your Letters to AnimeFan

While I'm often fighting with myself to figure out just how to fit everything in each month that I feel I need to cover, whenever I get the chance, I try to include the letters and artwork that you wonderful readers send to me. Well, here's another opportunity. This month, we've got a beautiful piece of ***Ranma 1/2*** artwork and letter from AnimeFan reader Mandy. Here's what she had to say:

GameFan + Shidoshi,
This is another one of your fans. I LOVE GameFan and anime. It's the best. It has video games and anime news all in one! You gotta love that! Anyway, Shidoshi, I know you don't really love Ranma 1/2, but I LOVE it! It's one of my favorite animes of all time.

I'm 15 years old, and I've been working on a lot of pics over the last couple of years. You can see some here... [http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Broadcast/3627/animepics.html] Anyway, I love to hear about new games and how the rest of the U.S.A. is finally seeing how GREAT anime really is. Thanx for having GameFan! Love it!

Mandy

If you would like to send in something to AnimeFan, here's the address (and make sure you write "Forward to Shidoshi" on your letter or package):

AnimeFan
6301 DeSoto Avenue
Suite E
Woodland Hills, CA
91367

- ***shidoshi***

Shidoshi's Fun Corner #4

No prize, no award, no pat on the back - just you and your wits to prove how hardcore you are. This time, our game is a little different. Answer the following questions to get a variety of letters. Once you get the letters from each question, use them to spell the Japanese name of a popular anime and manga title.

First letters of the first and last name of the video girl from Video Girl Ai

First letters of the first and last name of the voice actress who has voiced characters such as Lina Inverse and Faye Valentine.

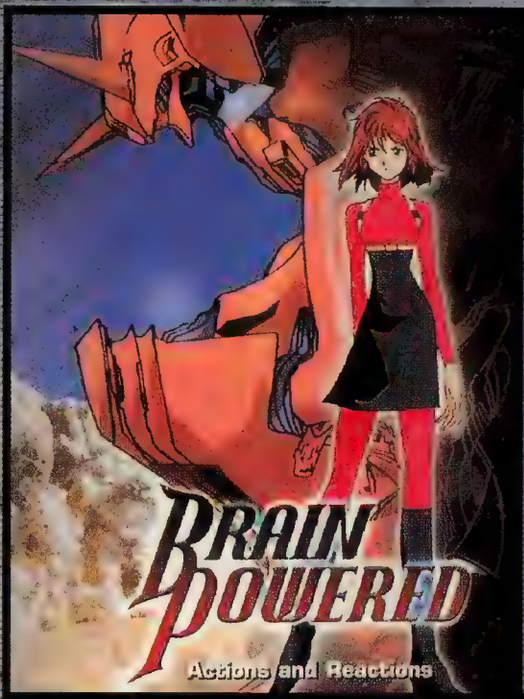
Three letters from the Japanese Romaji spelling of Sailor Mercury's first name.

Unscramble the following anime name, take out an animal and a name, and keep the remaining letters: G A N N V G E I L E

"Turned" letter from the newest Gundam series

Take the letter shared by the main show title and the last name of the original singing heroine from the show the US knows as Robotech.

Consonant used 49 times in this Fun Corner.



Drama • TV (6) • Bandai
15+ • 150 min • Sub | Dub

Brain Powerd Volume 4

Okay, I know what some of you might be saying... "Uhm, Shidoshi? Didn't you already review Volume 4 of *Brain Powerd* months and months ago?" Yes... yes I did. However, a rather big change has gone on since then. First, I had those episodes quite a bit in advance. And, this is the NEW Volume 4 of *BP*. New Volume 4? Since the time that Bandai whipped up the first four volumes, they decided to change the way they release *Brain Powerd* (and a few other titles as well). Now, instead of two episodes per volume, you get SIX. Yes, they went from following the worst distribution mode for TV episodes (something other companies are guilty of as well) to following one of the best we fans could get. Six episodes per tape, for a still very decent $29 price - crazy. Had Viz done that with *Maison Ikkoku*, the series wouldn't have been in trouble... not that I'm bitter or anything. So, since my previous review, have you seen *Brain Powerd*? If not, why? *BP* is an exception show in the grand tradition of big robot epics such as *Gundam* and *Macross* (and, to a lesser extent, *Evangelion*). An enthralling storyline, interesting mechs, deep characters, and the goddess of anime soundtracks Yoko Kanno providing the music, that's quite a mix there, my friends. *BP* is a show I can't get enough of - I watched six episodes in a row, and I still wanted more. So, anyhow, if you still aren't snatching up *Brain Powerd*, the fact that you now get six episodes subtitled for just under $30 negates any remaining reasons you could have to avoid the show. --*shidoshi*

VHS A- superb

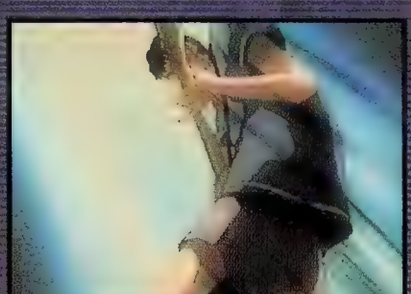
Adventure • TV (4) • Pioneer
13+ • 100 min • Sub | Dub

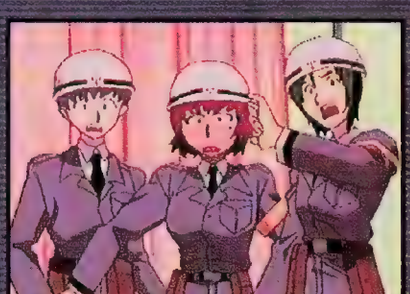
Black Heaven : Rock Bottom

Oji used to be young once. As the frontman for a heavy metal band known as "Black Heaven," Oji lived the fast, carefree lifestyle of a rock star. Time went on, people grew up, the world around him changed, and at some point, Oji had to give up his dreams for the realism life forces upon us. Now, Oji lives the life of a salary man, getting up early each day, commuting for an hour and a half, sitting all day at the desk of a nameless company as a nameless drone. But fate has more in store for Oji than he knows. It seems that the music that emanated from his guitar has the power to turn the tide in a bloody intergalactic war. In order to help stop the war, a group of beings from space come down to Earth to recruit Oji and his music as their new secret weapon.

Is it just me, or has Pioneer's releases been getting strange and stranger recently? That trend continues here with *Black Heaven*, and I mean, just look at the premise - aged rocker saves the universe with his guitar playing, while dealing with being a salary man. Huh?! Whether the show makes sense or not, the important part is that it is funny. F-U-N-N-Y. You might not think the boring, everyday life of a middle aged man could be so hilarious, but it is, especially once he gets mixed up with the aliens. Oji really is an interesting character - how often have we had an older, "out of touch" man as a hero? The supporting case does a great job of giving him situations to play off of, yet never really upstage him. Another recent AIC/Pioneer tradition is outstanding visuals, and *BH* doesn't stray from that path. The show's look and animation are great, with sharp, digital colors and cels. The style has a nice flair to it as well, giving it a look different enough to stand out. However, again with the AIC trends, CG and computer effects are present in *BH*. The CG that is used stands out too much, and looks horribly out of place whenever present (it is used mainly for the spaceships). Digital pans are also overused, and as well don't totally mix when followed seconds behind by more traditional anime techniques.

Back in high school, for a short time, I was into the whole heavy metal / glam rock scene (I blame it on my girlfriend at the time who got my into such music). After I was able to escape that horror, I swore to myself to fight the just, right fight against such tragic sounds. And yet, here a group of Japanese anime creators find a way to give such silliness a certain amount of charm and fun again. Bizarre set-up for an anime, and not just slightly reminiscent of *Macross* (though Minmay will ALWAYS be the true musical savior of the universe), *Black Heaven* comes out in the end as a lovable, wacky, refreshing new comedy that anyone could love. --*shidoshi*





VHS B+ good

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Comedy • OVA (2) • CPM
13+ • 90 min • Sub | Dub

Virgin Fleet

VHS B good

Energy... from virgins. Okay, here's the deal. Supposedly, girls who are still virgins have some sort of special chi-like power inside of them. In our tale, a special school has been set up to help virgin girls understand, control, and amplify their "virgin energy" to be used to combat the forces of evil (think the academy from *X-men*, for example). Shockingly, our story centers around Shiokaze, a young girl who is one of the worst students at the school. Yet, she holds immense power and surprises everyone as she soon becomes the key to everything that goes on. Bet you've never heard of such a storyline before, have you? Yes, that is indeed sarcasm.

Energy... from virgins. Yes, this is one of the more ridiculous ideas I've heard of as the basis for a storyline. I'm into some really weird stuff, but this was just too silly even for me to be able to take seriously. *Virgin Fleet* was created in part by Ohji Hiroi, who also helped create *Sakura Wars*. This fact will become very evident as you watch, because a number of times *VF* feels exactly like *SW*, except with a cast not quite as endearing (though, by the end of the show, I liked the cast far better than I did at the start). However, while initially I was all but ready to write off *VF*, as I watched I came to realize something: there is a dramatic, and actually quite good story going on here. Beneath the fluff, behind the silly "virgin energy" nonsense, there is a halfway decent war drama to be found. In fact, with two tweaks to the show, this could have turned out to be a real winner. First, of course, is the tossing out of any sort of mystical energy premise. Then, I would have changed the last five minutes of the final episode, where some of the more serious moments of the show are made worthless by negating them with a happy ending. Yes, *Virgin Fleet* tried too hard to give itself creativity. Yet, once you can get past the idea of virgin energy, and take the few scenes where that factor takes control of the show, I actually think what is presented beyond that is an enjoyable anime. I would have liked the show to have been even more of a serious war piece, but this is not a complete fluff anime like you might originally think. The show still won't be for everyone, but don't completely write it off before you've given it a chance. *Virgin Fleet* might just surprise you. - *shidoshi*

Comedy • TV (20) • ADV Films
12+ • 500 min • Sub | Dub

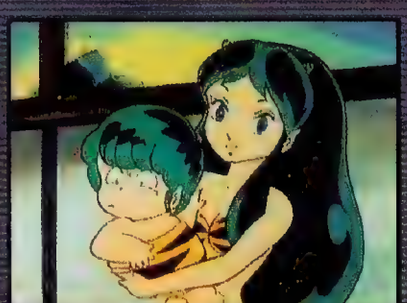
Urusei Yatsura DVD Collection 1

One of Rumiko Takahashi's two most popular creations (the other being Ranma something or other), *Urusei Yatsura* is the story of young Ataru Moroboshi, nanpa* at large. Everything that goes wrong seems to be Ataru's fault - but now, he is given the chance to make up for all of that. Aliens come down and threaten to take over the Earth, unless one human can beat them in competition. That human is Ataru - and his challenger is the sexy space vixen Lum. Somehow, Ataru pulls of a win at the last moment, and in the excitement, he cries out a warcry of marriage (Ataru's girlfriend Shinobu promised to marry him if he won). Lum, however, thinks that he means HER - and from that point on, Ataru's life is never the same again.

It's hard to believe that this series is around twenty years old. And, thanks to DVD, the show has never looked better. A few times here and there, the picture did look a bit iffy in the transfer, however, beyond some examples of pixellation and artifacts, things generally look great. For a series this old, colors are bright and art is crisp; this isn't your old VHS or LD transfer. The audio for the show hasn't received any sort of upgrade - it is still the original mono track - but that was expected to be the case from the start. While each DVD volume contains four TV episodes, menus are nothing more than links to each chapter, and extras are non-existent. However, the information note cards provided with each volume are an amazing collection of information on the show and its Japanese roots. AnimEigo has always provided such wonderful information cards, and it is nice to see them still going strong. I should also note that this is also a sub-only release. The dub wasn't well received, however, so the loss isn't all that great. While this collection won't win awards for extras and goodies and all of that, this is a fan's collection - fans of this great series will finally have the definitive, everlasting collection. And, by the time things are done, AnimEigo will release 28 *Urusei Yatsura* DVD volumes. That, in itself, is a whole lot of work. The show? Well, it's *Urusei Yatsura*. My chilly heart to Takahashi anime is indeed warming, as even I couldn't deny that this series is hilarious and charming.

This was a special order set, and any remaining stock will probably be gone by the time you read this. AnimEigo has stated that they plan to release the volumes individually about 9-12 months after the corresponding box set. So, if you missed out on this set, you'll have a while to wait, but you aren't out of luck. And, to be sure that you don't miss out on the future *Urusei Yatsura* DVD box sets, hit the AnimEigo website [www.animeigo.com] and get your name on the lists. - *shidoshi*

DVD A superb



*Nanpa - A womanizer; a guy who tries to date a lot of girls

Comedy • TV (4 eps) • Bandai
13+ • 100 min • Sub | Dub

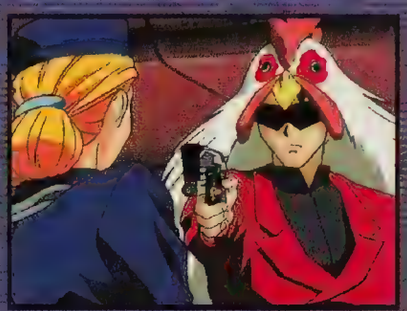
Lost Universe Volume 2

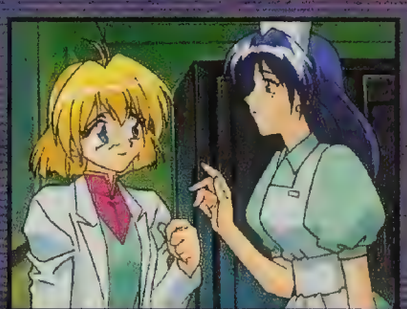
Kain Blueriver and his parter Canal, the computer personality of his ship the Swordbreaker, were a happy little team cruising around the universe doing jobs for hire. Happy, that is, until Millie fell into their lives. Now that she blames them for losing her detective job, she has decided to join in on the fun. The happy couple has now become a not so happy trio. Here we find the three once again traipsing around the universe, taking a variety of job offers. One involves them watching over an armament company as their security system is taken down for repairs, but it ends up being a trap as a mysterious old man plans to destroy the legendary Swordbreaker. Another time, the group is asked to watch over a girl's nursing school where chaos is breaking out, but when Canal's systems fail Kain must dress up like a woman to protect the nurses in training.

Wacky character comedies are a staple of the world of anime, and ***Lost Universe*** comes along in the tradition of such fair as the ***Slayers*** and ***Gunsmith Cats***. Different names, different locations, somewhat different faces, and different ways of bringing the cast together, but in the end something always feels the same. So, if you're going to make your show worthwhile, you've got to make things at least feel fresh and new. ***LU*** won't win an award for being the most original around, but you know what, it's a great show. The thing I liked the most is the main cast, because the characters have a nice balance among each other. Each character has their saving grace, yet each is also a complete idiot at the exact same time. Instead of having "the skilled one, the klutz, the brainless idiot," Kain, Millie, and Canal all have a little of each in their own way. At least for me, this made the characters feel more "human." The storylines are fun, and didn't drag too much, but an infusion of a little more humor wouldn't have hurt. The visuals for this show, be it due to the transfer or, my idea of the culprit, the original source for the show, didn't do much to show off the DVD format, or anime in general. Most of the colors were just too bland, too washed out, and the entire image just looked rough much of the time. I wouldn't call the show horrible visually, more along the lines of bland - trust me, the screenshots on the back of the package are going to spoil you.

DVD B good

Lost Universe is certainly a fun show, and a show that has what it takes to keep it up for an entire series if it plays its cards right. The strongest part of this show is its cast, and the interaction between the characters alone is enough for some good laughs. If you like your humor mixed in with a bit of adventure and a crazy set of characters, and you are a fan of anime like those I mentioned before, ***Lost Universe*** should be right up your alley.
- shidoshi





Action • OVA • Manga Ent.
15+ • 60 min • Sub | Dub

Sword for Truth

Shuranosuke is a swordsman known for his extreme skill. When he is hired by the Tokugawa Shogunate to rescue their princess, he is forced to travel a great distance and kill a lot of people in order to rescue her - the typical life of a mercenary. Now, at first, you might think ***Sword for Truth*** nothing more than a poor man's ***Ninja Scroll***. Indeed, it is very similar to Manga's other highly popular release, without such levels of production. The visuals in ***SfT*** are rather generic and bland, character designs are absolutely nothing new, and to be honest, little else stands out all that much. Yet, as time went on, there was just a certain something that caught my liking - and I think it was Shuranosuke. The show almost became a parody in the fact that no matter what happened, he won EVERY battle in seconds. Remember in ***Raiders of the Lost Ark*** when the guy with the big sword comes out, does lots of nifty tricks, and Indy just shoots him and moves on? Imagine that here: big tough new bad guy introduces himself, does lots of fancy moves, kills EVERYONE else around, and Shuranosuke slices once and it's done. You've just got to love it.

But then we hit the downfall of this show. As it was, my heart was ready to give this show a great review, even though my brain was telling me it wasn't all that special. And then we get to the end, and are left with the feeling that we've seen the first half of a two part series. Yet, we then also find out that there is no part two. This show build up characters, storylines, plot points, and does NOTHING will all of them. I mean, an important rival character shows up near the very end, and ends up having no real effect on the show. It is hard for me to explain to you just how bad this show is in having absolutely no hint of closure. So, my final verdict is this: this isn't an outstanding show, yet I loved watching it, yet I hated it in the end for building up a great many things and doing nothing with them. Even with being so spoiled by ***Samurai X*** recently, I still found enjoyment with ***Sword for Truth***. I would have enjoyed it far more had the series followed through with what it was doing, but what can you do. ***-shidoshi***

DVD B good

Ninja Toys Update

If you look at the bottom of this page, you'll notice some *Ninja Scroll* artwork. Well, I can tell you that this art is production designs for the upcoming figures. The figures, which are a team effort by the Mars Colony and Palisades Marketing (not just Palisades, as I stated before), should prove to be quite cool once they are finished and released. The figures should be released in early 2001, but a number of other *Ninja Scroll* products are also on the horizon, including high end resin statues, wall scrolls, and a collectible lunch box (to go with your *Lain* lunch box). Thanks to the Mars Colony for the below artwork.

US Anime TV Update

So how is anime doing on TV?

Well, here are a few numbers to let you know (and to glaze your eyes over), thanks to a Time Warner press release. Kids' WB posted a ratings share of 3.3/15 on September 23rd, which according to the press release beat out Fox Kids'. *Cardcaptors* (aka *Card Captor Sakura*) received its highest rating to date around that time, with the following ratings numbers: Boys 2-11 at 5.8/20, boys 6-11 at 7.0/24, general kids 2-11 at 4/1/15, and general kids 6-11 at 4.8/18. *Cardcaptors* ranked #2 among broadcast competition, only taking a backseat to *Pokemon*. And no, I've no idea what any of those numbers mean.

The new *Jackie Chan Adventures* cartoon beat out *Digimon* in the 9am timeslot. As I've not seen the Jackie Chan cartoon, I'll pass for now on either praising it or making fun of it. **grin**

Finally, that nasty *Batman Beyond* (which, being honest, is a cool show) beat out *Escaflowne*. Exact numbers for *Escaflowne* weren't mentioned.

Less Cut Kite?

Talk is currently going around that a "less cut" version of *Kite* will be coming in January on VHS. As many of you may know, great debate over the US release of *Kite* has raged on for probably at least a year. Some scenes in the show had to be toned down due to the fact that they would be very questionable by "US Standards" (though I often say that "US Standards" are themselves questionable at times). However, many feel that while they understand that Media Blasters had to do this in regards to some scenes, they went way too far in what they decided to cut or change.

With this new version, will the argument finally be settled? We'll have to wait until the new version of *Kite* comes out from MB's Kitty Media label at the beginning of next year. Unfortunately, no DVD release for this new version has been announced or planned. However, be aware that Media Blasters indeed knows that this is something the anime DVD community has been asking for for a long time.

Eternal New Series

According to reports, an anime TV series based on the Namco RPG *Tales of Eternia* will be hitting Japan soon, to go along with the release of the game for the PSX in Japan in November. The TV series will feature character designs by Mutsumi Inomata, and should be airing on satellite network WOWOW.

Pulp Adds New Column

In December 2000, Viz's mature manga anthology *Pulp* will be entering its fifth year. With the first issue of Volume 5, a new column by Warren Ellis, *Rolling Stone*'s "Hot Comics Writer," will being to be printed in the pages of *Pulp*.

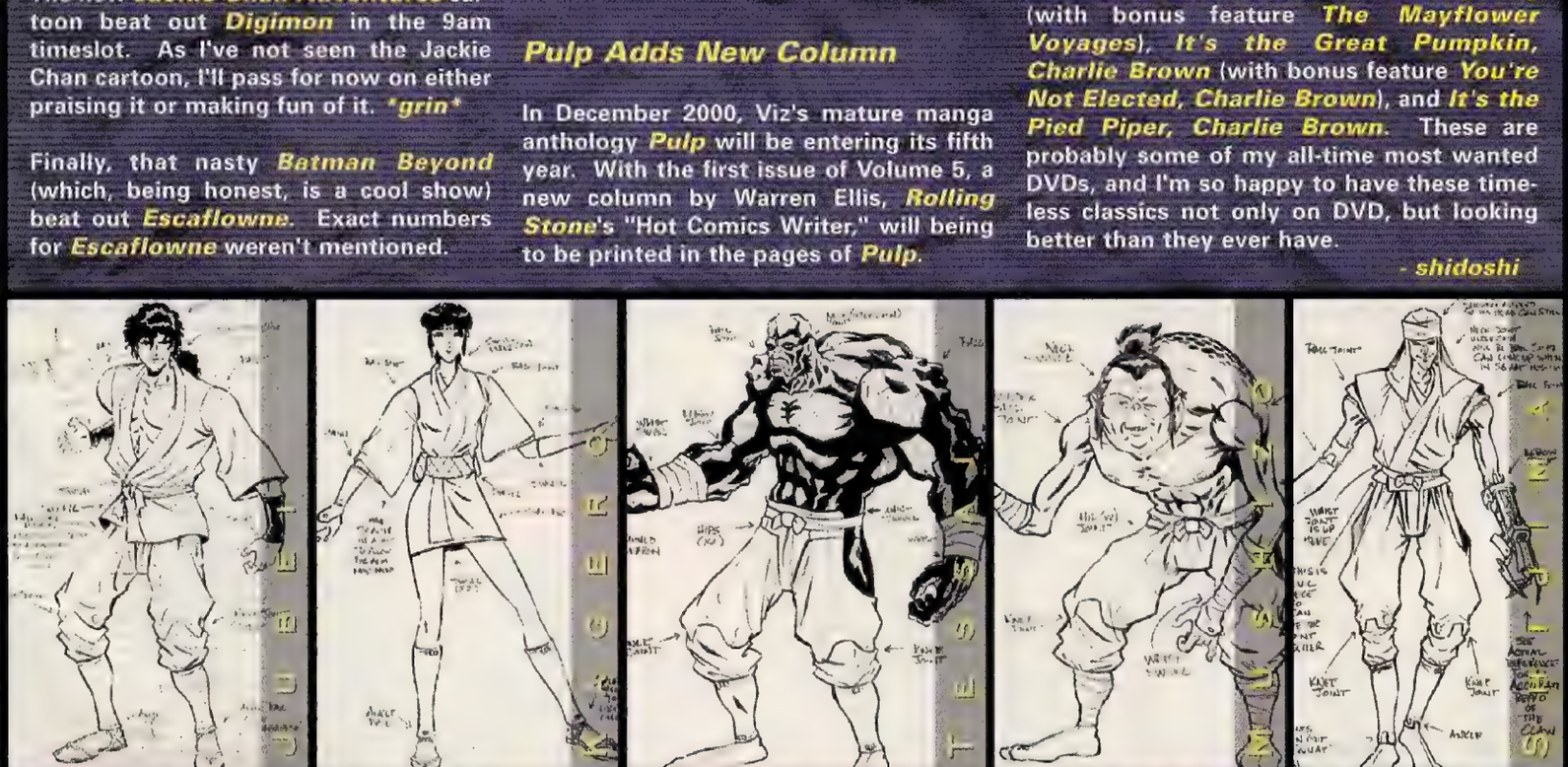
In this new column, the critically acclaimed English-language comics writer will discuss how American and Japanese culture interact through comics. "Western comics were not the same after *Akira*," Ellis says. "It was most Western people's first exposure to post-Tezuka, massively decompressed storytelling. And it was strange to see a Japanese comic, coming as it did from a place that still labored under lots of stereotyping and misconception from abroad,showing 'us' how to make a comic so utterly contemporaneous." Warren Ellis is the author of dozens of comic books, ranging from his early work for Marvel Comics to recent series for DC and independent publishers. His work ranges from superheroes to science fiction, horror, and other genres, including *Planetary*, *Stormwatch*, *The Authority* and *Transmetropolitan*, which has been praised by sources as diverse as *SPIN* magazine and science-fiction writer Michael Moorcock. Ellis is the recipient of multiple Eisner Awards, and is the genesis of some of the most high-traffic comics sites on the Internet, *www.warrenellis.com* and the Warren Ellis forum over on Delphi.

Pulp will also be adding in a new gag manga in January of next year, and a new horror manga in March 2001.

And Finally...

While this isn't anime, I've got to mention it. At long last, Charlie Brown and the rest of the *Peanuts* gang have made their way onto DVD. Currently four titles are available: *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (with bonus feature *It's Christmas Again, Charlie Brown*), *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* (with bonus feature *The Mayflower Voyages*), *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* (with bonus feature *You're Not Elected, Charlie Brown*), and *It's the Pied Piper, Charlie Brown*. These are probably some of my all-time most wanted DVDs, and I'm so happy to have these timeless classics not only on DVD, but looking better than they ever have.

- shidoshi



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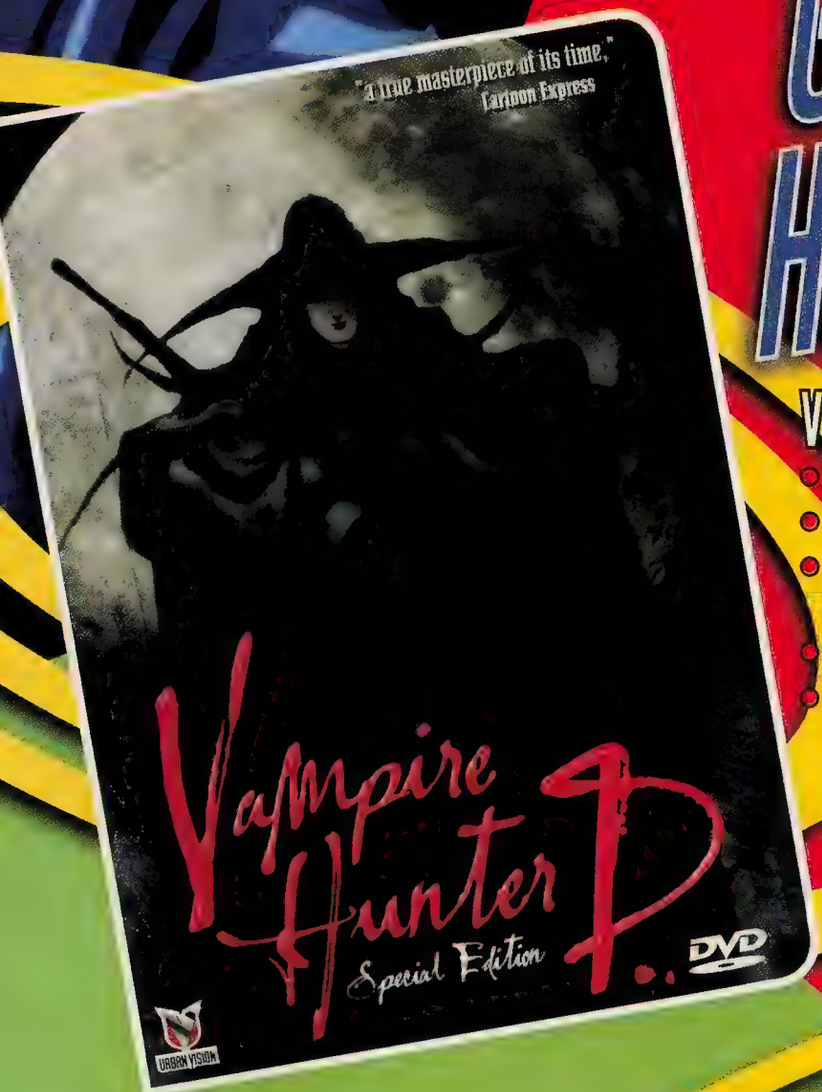

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- Original Theatrical Trailers!
- A Sneak Peek at the New Video Game!

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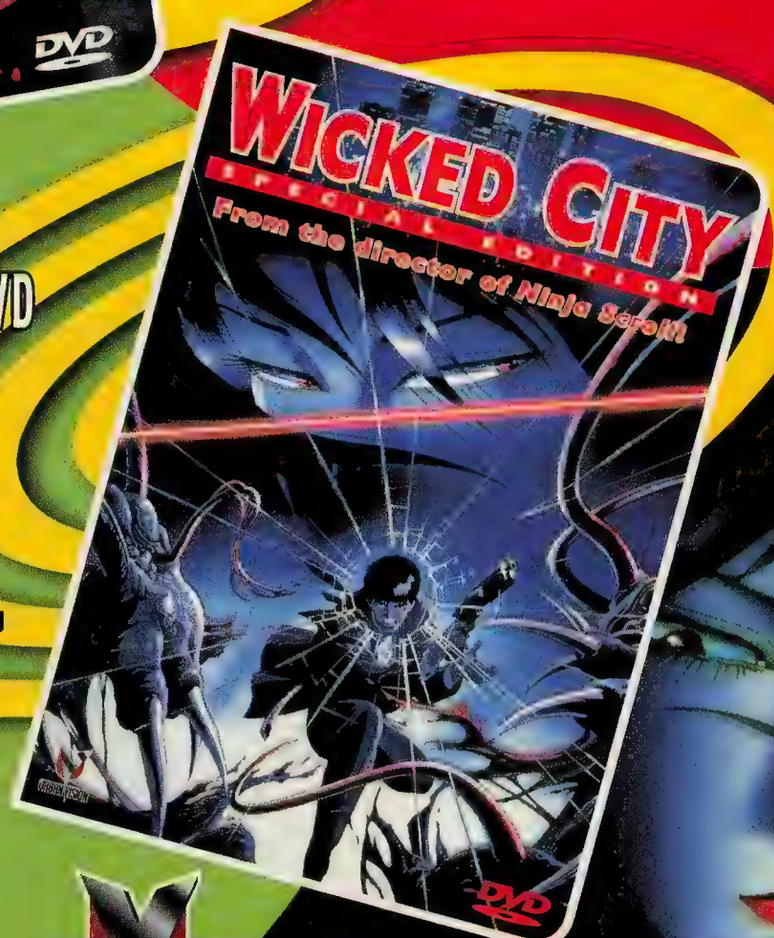

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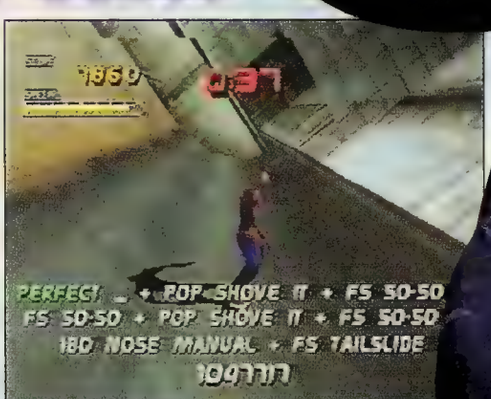
Tony Hawk 2 Codes

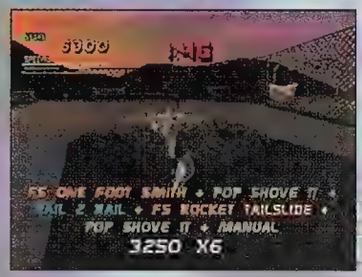
After beating the game with various characters (custom skater included) you'll gain access to certain cheats. We'd rather not spill how you get them, but, to get you started, here's a couple of cheats for those of you who need them:

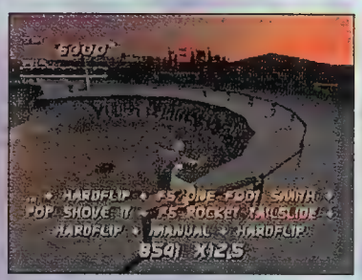
While playing, press START to pause the game, then, while holding L1, enter the following:

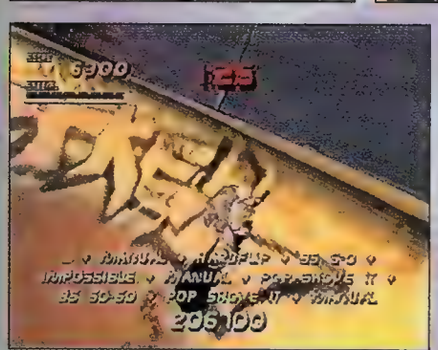
XTCCULTS = Infinite Special
SCULLSRUL = Big Head Mode
XTCSTUD = Maximum Stats

Some of the other stuff gained includes unlocking a Kid Mode (small versions of the skaters, except there's no little Spidey), Perfect Balance, and a Low Gravity Mode which allows massive air, and upwards of 1440's and 1620's!!! Officer Dick and the "Skip to Restart" from *THPS* also return for this sequel.









Hi-Fi's Hi-Score: GameFan Online editor Hi-Fi came up with this doozy of a combo on his own and came by the office to show it off for us. If you pull it off without a hitch, you'll net over 200,000 points. As you'll notice, his combo involves multiple special moves at the beginning and lots of manuals to fill in the gaps between grinds. The beauty of the combo is you can keep it going beyond the point shown. He claims to have gone all the way around the course before, although we don't have the pictures to prove it. Thanks, Hi-Fi for sharing this insane combo with us.

HOCUS POCUS • HOCUS POCUS • HOCUS POCUS •

Manuals: Manuals are what set *Tony Hawk 2* apart from the original. Learn how to do these well, because they make the difference between a 60,000 point combo and a 250,000+ combo. This simple move (performed by moving the d-pad down and then up or up and down) serves as a link between one combo and the next. Consider it an imaginary grind which you control. Simply throw a manual onto the end of your current combo, steer over to another area, and then continue the combo. It's as simple as that. All of our high-scoring combos contain multiple manuals. Check out Hi-Fi's combo earlier for some major manual madness.

Climbing Walls: Second only to manuals, this is an important skill which makes life a lot easier once you've mastered it. Being able to jump up to rooftops in seconds provides you access to hidden areas or valuable shortcuts which save precious time. To jump to a rooftop, build up some speed, come at the wall at a semi-sharp angle (1), hit "X" to jump, immediately hit "Triangle" to start a wall ride (2), then immediately hit "X" again to ollie off the wall (3), hit "Triangle" again to grind on the edge of the roof (4), then just jump sideways onto the roof. The key to this sequence is doing it quickly. The 'wall ride, ollie' must be performed almost instantaneously. If you're having problems, try keeping your fingers over both buttons so you don't have to move them.

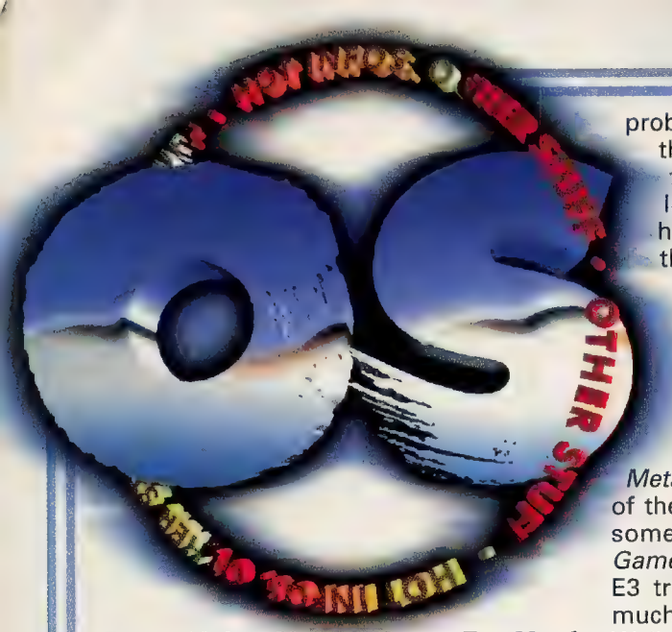
Crazy Combos: The idea behind a high scoring combo in *Tony Hawk 2* is simple: Start your combo with a high scoring special move or two, then tack on the multipliers and manuals at the end. If you're grinding, just jump off, do a quick kickflip in the air, then land and continue to grind to add a multiplier to the combo. You don't need to start a combo with a lot of momentum; in fact, sometimes you'll want to start at a near stand-still. Whenever you do a special grind, your character builds up speed very quickly, and considering special grinds are worth a ton of points, you're better off holding them as long as possible by starting off slow. Quantity (a bunch) of special moves may not be worth as much as a single quality special grind (which can net you 10,000 easily before multipliers).

Beating the Game: You can unlock special codes, hidden characters, and movies by beating the game multiple times. Finish the game entirely (clear all the levels 100%) with a custom character and Spider Man will become playable. Beat it with Tony Hawk and you'll unlock '80s Tony Hawk. Complete it with a regular skater other than Tony and you'll get Officer Dick. Then keep going to get the rest.

'80s Tony Hawk ***Kid Mode*** ***Low Gravity Mode*** ***Officer Dick*** ***Play as Spidey!!***

Advertiser's Index

3DO 16-17, 168-IBC
Activision 7
A.D. Vision 153
Agetec 32-33
Atlus 95
Bandai 107
Capcom ..... 2-3, 116-117, BC
DCC 73
DVD Express 125, 146-149
Eidos 54-55, 101, 134-135
Enix 11
G.O.D. 53, 83, 87, 115
Jaleco 12-13
Koei 93
Konami 4-5, 60-61, 62-63, 64-65, 76-77
Majesco 30-31
Namco 15
Sega 49-51, 88-89
Sony IFC-1
Tecmo 44-45, 123, 141
Titus 59, 109
Ubi Soft 8-9, 20-21
Urban Vision 157
Working Designs 42-43, 85, 111, 139



Day... Toh... Nah 8 Player For You!

The upcoming *Daytona* on Dreamcast has us all excited. Network play so you can race others in 60 fps madness? Can you say, "No sleep for you?" Well, we are losing sleep over this latest. A little bird tells us that while the game allows for 8 players at the same time in the Japanese version, the U.S. one might only support 4 players at once. Ugh... this is just more fuel for those "SegaNet sucks!" guys to play with.

Eidos Pulls Out

Word on the street has it that mega-publisher Eidos Interactive is withdrawing from the PC market to focus development on consoles. Coming off the heels of the disastrous *Daikatana* for PC, this rumor doesn't surprise us at all. Io Interactive is said to be working on Eidos' last PC game.

Coming Soon... Sega's X-box!

We're reading into this a little bit, but we've heard lots of sources mention this rumor earlier. Various sources at Sega of America are cryptically saying, "We expect to hang around for about another year." What comes out in about a year? Who needs software development the most in the upcoming console war? Can you say a Microsoft acquisition of Sega? People have talked about this for a while, but it really does make sense. Sega's games behind a Microsoft-powered and marketed console would spell **big** trouble for the competition.

Sony's World Is Not Square?

Industry insiders have been speculating about a renewed Square/Nintendo partnership for quite some time. The initial reason that the two had a falling out was Nintendo's pig-headed decision to use costly cartridges as the format for the N64. With Nintendo's Game Cube switching over to a much more affordable DVD format, format should no longer be a problem. We wouldn't put much faith in this rumor (most likely it's just wishful thinking on the part of Nintendo loyalists), simply because Square has so much invested in Play Online that it seems sketchy to support other systems right now.

Hideo Kojima's Second Coming Playable!

Sony fanboys are quick to point to *Metal Gear Solid 2* as the light at the end of the tunnel for the PS2. There's been some pretty heated debates in the *GameFan* office over how much of that E3 trailer is actually playable and how much is pre-scripted cinematic drivel. Well, hopefully many of the questions can be put to rest this February when everyone is given the chance to actually play *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* firsthand. Hideo Kojima's *other* game, *Zone of the Enders*, is being released then with a playable demo of *MGS2*. Fury already has the date marked and circled three times on his calendar.

<Hikaru!>... Gesundheit!

A source who wished to remain nameless dropped this interesting tidbit of information in our laps. Sega is supposedly working on a top secret peripheral for the Dreamcast. What is it, you ask? Consider it an N64-like RAM pack which upgrades the Dreamcast to the point that it can handle games with graphics like Hikaru or Naomi 2. Eek!

Thank You, Sir. May I Have Another?

Damn you, Neversoft! Look at what you've done! Activision is following up the unbelievable success of *Tony Hawk* with *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX*. Not only that, Acclaim is trying to cash in with its own BMX game in *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX* and THQ is rumored to have one as well. If our sources are correct, EA is also pitching its hat into the ring with yet another BMX game, though the platform, name, and developer are still unspecified. Can the market possibly be flooded before the first game even comes out?

Port Box Wooing Heavy Hitters

Microsoft has been talking about the X-box quite a bit lately, even going so far as releasing a list of developers supporting the system. Noticeably absent from the list of 3rd party developers are Sony's biggest allies: Square and Electronic Arts. One source has stated that both companies will have press conferences shortly to announce their support of the system, though we find this highly questionable. The timing doesn't make sense so close to Christmas. Only time will tell how this drama unfolds, but we can only speculate that EA shareholders are unhappy about Sony's releasing only 500,000 units instead of the expected 1,000,000 which everyone was banking on. Jumping ship is not out of the question.

Round One... TYPE!

Though this is unconfirmed, it'd be nice if it were true: Sega of Japan is planning some ports of Dreamcast games to PC. *Hundred Swords*, *Let's Make A Professional Baseball Team*, *Jet Set Radio* and *Typing of the Dead* were the titles mentioned. *Typing of the Dead* (on PC) is supposedly scheduled for a December release in Japan, and it will have network support, meaning you can show off your typing prowess to strangers online!

Bad, Retro... BAD!!

We hope this one isn't true... Sources are telling us that Shigeru Miyamoto (gaming god, and creator of almost everything Nintendo except for *Metroid*, which was made by the late Gunpei Yokoi) is supervising the new *Metroid* for Game Cube, and he's disappointed with what he's seen out of Retro Studios, the U.S. development studio behind the project. If this is true, fans shouldn't be reaching for their shotguns yet. Nintendo has a reputation for having very high quality assurance standards.

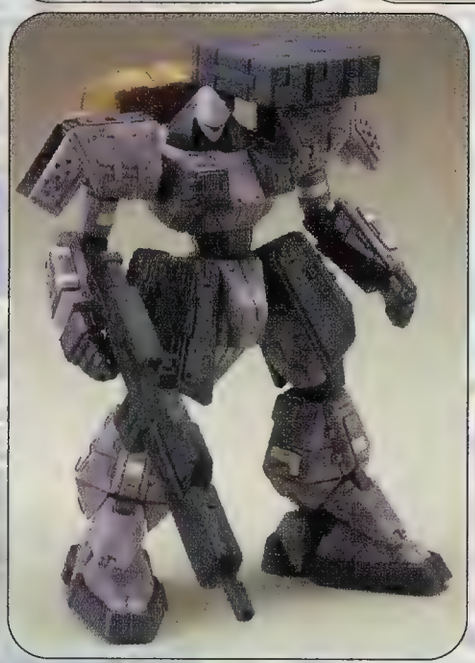
You Naughty Dog You...

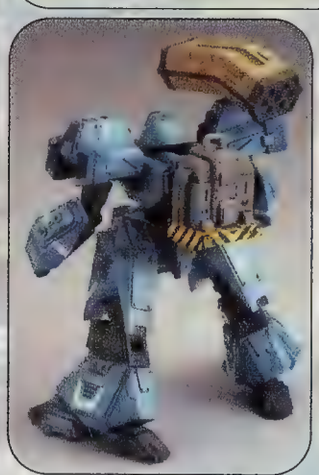
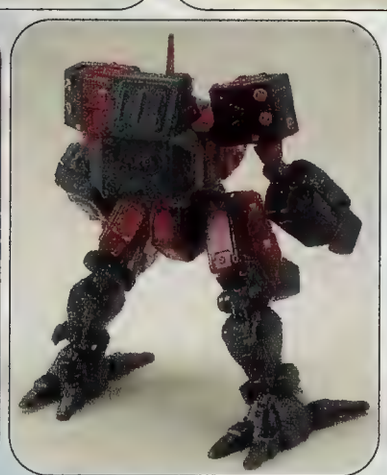
Everybody knows that Naughty Dog, creator of *Crash Bandicoot*, is working on a PlayStation 2 game that doesn't involve the wily bandicoot (Universal has the rights to *Crash*). However, we've heard that Naughty Dog is also working on a surprise Dreamcast game. Wouldn't it be amusing see a *Crash*-like game on DC? Universal and Konami have already expressed interest in taking the actual *Crash* license (along with *The Thing* and *Jurasic Park III*) to other consoles already, such as X-box, Game Cube, and Game Boy Advance, in addition to PS2.

VOOT Append Gotta Mix

As many of you know, VOOT 5.66 is the latest version of *Virtual On: Oratorio Tangram* released in Japanese arcades. While many of us have heard that it will also be the last *VO* game in the series, we're now hearing that it will be the last version that Juro Watari (the creator) will work on. However, the series, apparently, will continue without him. Also, Sega is talking about releasing an append disc for *VOOT* on DC. The extra disc would upgrade your home version to 5.66. If this is true, no word yet on an American upgrade for the domestic release.

Front Mission 3 toys are cool. Yep, courtesy of the fine folks at Palisades (see them at www.palisadesmarketing.com) who've been sending ECM action figures for months now—we figure due to some shipping snafu... but he always seems so happy when he gets them... minus the *Tekken* figures; those just upset him. These highly detailed, very well-articulated figures were a hit at the office, and even prompted Kodomo to try and snag a few of them when ECM was out of town one day. Needless to say, the handy tiger pit ECM set up for just such occassions saved the day, and the *FM3* figures are still firmly ensconced on his shelf. So if you like action figures (you do, right?) get ye out there and pick some of these up in time for Christmas.



SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

"The overall effect of this technical and artistic detail is quite amazing, even to the point of fooling your mind into not being too impressed because it looks so much like the real thing."

—The Official Dreamcast Magazine UK on Bizarre Creations' Forthcoming Metropolis Street Racer

This month we figured we'd spread the love to our pals across the pond at the Official DC Magazine UK—turns out it's not a good month for official DC magazines (see the *Shenmue* review for more on that). The above quote sorta mystified us, what with the implication that the graphics in the game were so good, we'd be tricked into thinking that they weren't that good... uh... right.

So let me get this straight: The graphics in this game are so beautiful, so skillfullly rendered, so eye-pleasingly detailed, fast, and bloody brilliant that, in reality, they're not that good?! This calls for a moderately painful logic puzzle... hope you have the Advil handy:

Now, if the graphics in this game look "so much like the real thing" that they're "fooling your mind into not being impressed." wouldn't that mean that I know I'm being fooled and therefore I'd realize that, in actuality, I should be impressed? Or would it mean that realizing that I was realizng they were impressive, I'd then come to understand that they weren't that impressive because, after all, if something looks so good that it's real, I once again wouldn't be impressed because reality really isn't that impressive? But in realizing that I wasn't being impressed, then wouldn't I eventually reach the conclusion that, in reality, the graphics really never were that impressive, that I work for an 'official' magazine, and that maybe, just maybe, I'm talking out of my ass because I'm supposed to?

Uh-huh. We thought so...

FanFan

Tales of the Hardcore!

I tell ya, gamers these days have it easy. In place of determination, now exists the Game Shark and a mountain of FAQs for nearly every title produced. What, you can't unlock all the hidden characters in *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*? No problem, just download the complete save off the Net. What happened to the challenge I ask you? What happened to the thrill of the **true** gaming marathon?

Yup, back when most of the GameFan staffers were teenagers (So, Reubus, tell us what it was like growing up during Prohibition?), games like *Rygar* on the NES left many of us with a nice helping of social ineptitude. Why, because long before walk-throughs and other assorted cheats came into the picture, it was all about beating games in one sitting. High school dances, dating, graduation... mere distractions on your quest to rescue the Princess. That's right, a six pack of coke (though Red Bull has proven a worthy substitute... hey, someone pry Kodomo off the ceiling!), a bottle of No Doz and a vision—that was all it took! But gamers have gotten soft as of late, (sure, I might have used a few continues in *Strider 2*... but I didn't need them) and too often, take the easy way out when defeating a game. Hey, I'm no stranger to throwing in the old towel, but if time's on my side, I'm burning the midnight oil till I hit paydirt! But by the same token, I also abide by the laws of nature, and at some point, using the bathroom and getting a bit of shut eye has got to take precedence over unbending fortitude. Or does it?

His name is Dustin Castillo, aka Postmeister Jr. (Note: it was late one night and Posty senior had downed a few drinks and well, you know how the rest goes...) who, like many gamers during the DC launch, found himself sh** out of luck in the VMU department. So did the lack of an available save feature sway Dustin from enjoying Yu Suzuki's brilliant *Sonic Adventure*? Does a bear crap in the woods? (Hmm, that might not be such a good analogy.) Well it didn't (I mean with Dustin you sickos), and if you've had a chance to play through *SA*, you know first-hand it ain't a short game. 18 hours from 7pm to 11am is all it took and, according to Dustin, he didn't stop once for food or the bathroom (hmmm, do I water the flowers and then beat Robotnik or just take care of it tomorrow?). Well, Mr. Castillo, our hats are off to you. Perhaps we'll talk again after you've unlocked Super Sonic... **Fury**

FanSite of the Month

www.classicgaming.com/shmups

We start FSotM with ECM's fav site: Shmups! Home of classic, 2D (for the most part) 'you against the world' shooters. No first person shooters, no tequila shooters, and no web shooters (weak *THPS2* reference)—just the best site with the best message board on the 'Net—go there now!!!

CosPlay Corner

Name: Kimi Pasamonte
Nickname: Hichan, Hikki
Cosplay Group: PhoeniX SeeD Cosplay
Website URL: www.phoenixseed.com
Eye Color: Brown
Hair Color: Black
Ht: 4'11" Not quite 5' yet!
Wt: 100 - 105 lbs.
Measurements: 34-25-35
Location: So. California
Age: 19
DOB: 7-11-81
Astrological Sign: Cancer, Rooster
Blood Type: O
Likes: Cosplay, WWF! Edge and Christian and Triple H... Stef is quite possibly the perfect woman! Online chat and webpeiji building, manga, anime, Bemani Bemani Bemani! DDR c'mon c'mon! Guitar Freaks, Keyboard Mania, etc., sweet treats like ice cream, cakes, must have my boba lai cha on a daily basis, watching movies... all movies! puzzles... you know, the ones that are at least a thousand... or they're too easy... especially puzz-3D... those are my faves, exercising, martial arts, tennis, fencing, HK cinema, NSYNC, Britney Spears, 2gether, Utada Hikaru, Amuro Namie, Cibo Matto, Eurodance <takes a deep breath> and most of all... children! My main hobby is husband hunting right now =p I don't want a boyfriend, I need a husband! I hope I didn't forget anything.
Dislikes: Grass! Seriously... I don't walk on grass or greeneries... Veggies! I don't eat veggies or greeneries... I have a "herb-o-phobia"! Fast food... anything greasy or oily, laziness, huge spans of water... I can't swim, people who tell a lie, people who assume before knowing the truth, hypocrites.

Drawn Out

Sir David of San Jose, sends us what we're calling his salute to the US men's beach Volleyball team's recent Gold Medal.

The suddenly prolific **Lowena Ko** puts the smack down with the, uh, Ko sisters... how apropos.

Marian Churchland via Toronto, sends this now-framed (in ECM's office) piece of *Metal Slug* art—more please!

Lowena Ko of Coquitlam BC submits this fine example of SNK's first lady (sorry Shidoshi) Mai Shiranui.

Daniel Peguero from New York, NY wings some *Dragonball* action our way—but where's Cell?

THE POSTMEISTER!

Write to me, I'm running for president!!!
The Postmeister
6301 DeSoto Avenue Suite E
Woodland Hills, CA 91367

DAS BOOTLEG

Dear Posty,

Does it ever worry you how mainstream game bootlegging is becoming? It seems like everywhere I go on the internet, people are selling bootlegs left and right. And, I have to say it, it just doesn't seem right. I believe that piracy signals the slow death of any industry, but my friends have no problem with bootlegging. What is your take on this issue?

Also, can I take the Post-Fu exam? I've been practicing; my skill with the keyboard and mouse of an iMac are nothing short of legendary in some circles (very, very small circles). So can I? Please? I'll be your best friend! Except I don't deserve the honor of your friendship... but please?

P.S. I have a silly name; my life is hard enough. So please?

Loyal-fan,
Jurgen van den Gugel

Jurgen,

Be proud of your namesake! Yes, Jurgen may make you a target on the playground, but it is a helluva lot cooler than being named Stewart. It is also the name of one of the coolest actors, Jürgen Prochnow, who was amazing in Das Boot. *You aren't Eurotrash, are you?*

To the question at hand: bootlegging. We are fairly leery of piracy as well. While some piracy in the PC gaming world is healthy (look what it did for Quake 2 *and the original Windows operating system), most Honk Kong knock-offs are bleeding profits out of companies, in the console market. Fewer profits equal fewer niche games, which equal even fewer quality titles in an industry full of garbage product. Would the elimination of piracy refocus big publishers on edgy games that didn't rely on flashy licenses to sell? Probably not, but it can't hurt.*

I don't want to dig any deeper on that subject though, because to do so would force me to take stances on the cloudier issues like Bleem. I happen to fully support those guys but don't want to be branded a hypocrite by some jerk who can't see how that is actually healthy for the industry. Then there's Napster... d'oh! That's a whole 'nother can o' worms!

Well, once some more games come out on Mac that will allow you to flaunt those keyboard and mouse skills, then we'll talk. Although I'd be curious to see you go up against Reubus in Unreal Tournament *or* Quake III Arena. *He, too, is Mac man.*

GET THIS MAN A JOYSTICK

Posty,

Why do game companies always make crappy arcade sticks? It seems almost impossible to pull off supers in *SF3: Double Impact* with the Sega "Official" stick. Can you recommend one that actually works? And doesn't have an annoying ball at the top.

On to other things. Why did Capcom delay *Cannon Spike*!?! It's been getting kickin' reviews (except for one lame magazine, that I would not like to talk about right now... you know who you are) plus it has Capcom characters blowing stuff up! It's a sure-fire win, so why am I not playing it now? I have to wait till February? Not cool at all.

Thank you that is all.
Quijibo

Quijibo,

Arcade sticks have always been an issue in this office. No warrior worth his salt should be without some kick-ass sticks. And for the most part, you are right: the majority of sticks out there blow. When not building our own sets, jedi style, we use MAS Systems sticks. Look for them at www.massystems.com; they will do you right.

Yeah we were bummed about the whole Cannon Spike *thing too. The game is a major blast to play and we were itching for it to hit the shelves, but the reasoning behind the push is a good one. Unofficially (of course) it has been delayed because of all of the Capcom titles that are coming out around then. Capcom doesn't want to cannibalize their own profits. So while we have to wait, which is a bad thing, it is in the best interest of the game... and that is a good thing.*

MISGUIDED GAMER

Dear Posty,

What's with the Dreamcast's games not having much FMV? Is there a problem with the system or is it that the developers are too cheap to get some? And don't throw *RE: Code Veronica* [at me] because, although it was amazing, it did look a little blurred—not sharp and crisp like the PlayStation's FMV. And why is it that the every single piece of #$%* PSX game has a least a good FMV? It's not fair. Please, oh wise one, answer me, for I am the biggest Sega fan and deserve an answer.

[Name withheld to protect his identity]

Dear Carlos (oops!),

Shame on you! Have we not taught you anything if but to see past the frilly extras to the core of what a good game should be: gameplay? I, for one, am glad that Dreamcast developers aren't wasting their time, effort and funds on something as extraneous as FMV. Since when did an FMV ever make a game better? Are you saying you'd have liked Blasto *(I am giving you the benefit of the doubt on that one) if it had some bitchin' movies? Ugh.*

While FMV is certainly a nice addition to any title (as long as you can skip it if you want), it isn't necessary and should be the absolute last thing developers should worry about. Most of them have a hard enough time just making games with good gameplay without distractions like that.

I HAVE LOTS TO SAY!!!!

Posty

I, also, am a ferocious & feared postal worker. Since we are one of a kind I thought you could give my questions priority (as in priority mail). Here goes:

1. Is Sega planning a *Vectorman* for Dreamcast?
2. What's up with the *Chakan* DC game?
3. After *Skies of Arcadia* & *PS Online*, what other first-party RPGs does Sega have in the works?
4. Do you know whether Climax is planning a DC game along the lines of the Genesis *Landstalker* or Saturn *Dark Savior*? I liked *Blue Stinger*, but 3/4-overhead perspective quest games seem to be Climax's forte!
5. Have the 3rd party developers abandoned DC for PS2? What's the outlook for the 'Cast? Such a cool machine with such tremendous games (as long as

they aren't PC ports... blechh), I'd hate to see Sega's best game machine since the Genesis bite the dust before it's had its proper moment in the spotlight.

=RIP
Greensboro NC

Dear, er, Postal

Good to see someone that really knows good games when they see 'em. We were just reminiscing about Vectorman *the other day. (Check out last month's Graveyard.) That game ruled! Unfortunately, the forecast isn't looking so good for a Dreamcast update. This would be a shame since that was one of the truly shining titles on the Genesis (no small feat).*

Chakan*, on the other hand, is another story. Did you see the piece we wrote on it earlier in the year? It's coming, but Ed and Co. are still looking for a suitable publisher. We will have more on that title in an upcoming issue.*

Let's not get ahead of ourselves on the RPG front either. Phantasy Star Online *hasn't even shipped and you already want more. Just cross your fingers and hope* Shining Force *is on its heels.*

You're killing me, I have no concrete answers for any of your queries. Climax is involved with Illbleed *and that is all I am sure of. Whether or not developers are jumping ship is another story. I have heard much rumor about a mass exodus to the PS2 but I am fairly certain that many will come back to the DC. The PS2 is much more difficult to develop for (not to mention more expensive) and I don't think it will be as successful as everyone is predicting.*

Keep your chin up though. Sega has been releasing some great games, including many updates and sequels to classic titles. That trend will undoubtedly continue. I will pray alongside you for a Vectorman *and* Landstalker *though. Those games ruled!*

WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS

Dear Posty,

I was wondering where the heck is Cerberus? In the last three or four issues I've noticed that Cerberus hasn't reviewed or discussed any action. Why? I've been an early fan of you guys... and I care about [you] people at GameFan.

Joseph Pavia
a.k.a. Atomic Wolf
Indio, CA

Dear Joseph,

It is good to know that people care about us. As for Cerberus, he is... um... well, have you ever seen Old Yeller*?*

GAMEFAN NIGHTS

Dear Posty,

Uh, how's it goin'? As much worldly knowledge as you have, I still kind of doubt you can help me, as it may be too early to answer [this] question. First of all, as few people out there that there are that bought a Saturn (I'm one of them being a long time fan of Sega arcade games) some of us might remember a masterpiece called *Nights.* Any chance of a sequel, on Dreamcast?

Thom Urso [and about 50 other people]

Dear Thom and the throngs of others,

Wow, have I gotten a lot of mail asking about this title! As of right now, Sega has made no announcements concerning Nights *or a sequel. This innovative Saturn title remains on the development shelf, collecting dust. Just like my pappy used to say when we would scour for survivors at circus big top disaster sites: "Hope for the best but expect the worst."*

SHARK ATTACK!

Greetings venerable Posty, master of Post-Fu. I have journeyed far and wide on my quest. I seek the elusive version 1.99 of Interact's GameShark, on [PlayStation]. We approach the one-year mark since my beloved third 1.99 was crippled by entering unauthorized codes from the GameShark Code Creators Club. There have been codes from there that have killed or crippled three of Interact's 1.99 GameShark on PSX. Posty, old friend, fellow master of Post-Fu. Venerable Posty, I need at least two versions of 1.99 on PSX. I have scoured the net. I have called cities of used game stores. The pain, Posty; make the pain go away. Still, after nearly twelve months of searching still no version 1.99 GameShark.

THEDOCTOROFDEATH (via e-mail)

Dear Doctor,

That is quite a conundrum you have there—and I can understand your desires to get a hold of another copy of this GameShark 1.99. I however, will not help you. No master would ever seek the usage of a device designed to let you cheat at games. It is contrary to all of the teachings of Post-Fu. If you wish to continue on this path, then you must travel it alone. True, it is an easier path to use the cheat box, but whoever said being a hardcore gamer was a walk in the park? If you want to ever reach enlightenment in the ways of Post-Fu, you must turn your back on this machine. It is for the mainstream gamers. Let them enter their Tomb Raider *and* Army Men *codes into it. You do not need such a crutch if you are truly Post-Fu caliber.*

YEAH, YEAH WE KNOW

Most Exalted Postmeister,

How do you prefer to be addressed, anyways? Two questions have been relentless in torturing my mind. First and foremost, why must there be so many godforsaken [subscriber inserts] in the mag? There is not twenty of me wishing to subscribe to your illustrious mag!

Secondly, what is this SegaNet, an add-on for the Dreamcast? Stop laughing! I have been under a rock for the past few years. A rock that pays minimum wage and has a mother of a bad temperament.

Paul B.
Pueblo, CO

Paul,

You can call me Al. As for those inserts, yeah they are annoying; you'll get no argument here. Nothing is worse than trying to read the mag and having one of those cards falling into your lap. My advice would be to pull them all out and pass them out to friends!

Don't feel stupid that you don't know what SegaNet is. Not many people are aware of it. Simply put, SegaNet is a new device that is being distributed by Sega of Japan for catching monkeys.

BRING BACK MONITAUR!

Hey Posty, I wasn't sure if you are the man to send this to, but no one in the world seems to have any info and you seemed like the only one at GameFan that would be willing to help. I know I saw a story a while back about an adapter that allows Saturn controllers to be hooked up to a Dreamcast, but now I can not find a thing about it. I love my Saturn arcade sticks and would love to continue to use them on my new system. Do you or anyone else there at GameFan know where I can find such a wonderful accessory? Thank you so much for any kind of help that you can provide.

P.S. The Monitaur totally kicked butt, why can't you guys bring him back, even if only for a one pager in the mag?

Take it easy.
Eric Finch

Dear Finch (like the bird, right?),

The item you're heart so desperately desires can be found at many fine online retailers the world over. ECM seems to have a predilection for the chaps over at **www.videogamedepot.com** *so you might want to check them out first. It's called a Total Control adapter (which I believe is on version three), and yes, you can use all your Saturn peripherals with the DC, including your much-loved Arcade Sticks.*

As for Monitaur, we've been toying with bringing Big Blue back from the retirement home for some time now... What do the rest of you think? Let me know, and I'll forward your replies to him, in hopes that he'll return to his rightful place.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence

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MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood and Gore
Animated Violence
PlayStation
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